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THE
BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

OR

Anecdotes, Similes, Emblems, Illustrations; Expository, Scientific, Geographical, Historical, and Homiletic, Gathered from a Wide Range of Home and Foreign Literature, on the Verses of the Bible

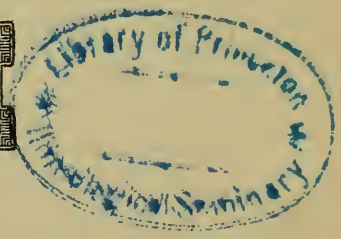
BY

REV. JOSEPH S. EXELL, A. M.

JOSHUA

JUDGES

RUTH



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INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF JOSHUA.

THE TITLE OF THE BOOK.—This book, like several others of the historical books of Scripture, derives its name from its contents. It records almost exclusively the acts of Joshua in fulfilment of the commission laid upon him from God by the hand of Moses (*cf.* Deut. xxxi. 7, 8), and terminates with Joshua's death and burial. Hence it very appropriately bears in the Hebrew the simple title of Joshua: in the LXX that of Ἰησοῦς Ναυή or Ἰησοῦς υἱὸς Ναυή. (*T. E. Espin, B.D.*)

THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE BOOK.—The Jewish rabbins and early Christian writers all supposed this book to have been written by Joshua himself; but this is an impossible assumption, for besides telling of his death it alludes to a number of things that did not happen until long after that event (*see, e.g.*, xv. 63 compared with Judg. xix. 10–12; and xix. 47, with Judg. xviii. 7, 27 *seq.*). In fact, like the other historical books of the Old Testament, it is an anonymous writing, and when critically examined is seen to have been originally united to the Pentateuch, and to have been composed in the same manner. It is made up of extracts from various narratives, pieced together by a later hand in the manner of Eastern historians, and in its present form cannot be much earlier than the time of Ezra. Most modern critics are agreed that the documents used by the editor were mainly three—the Jehovistic (known to critics by the symbol JE), of the eighth or ninth century; the Deuteronomistic (D) of the seventh; and the Priestly (P) of the fifth. To the Jehovistic document belong in the main chapters ii. 1–viii. 29; ix. 1–xi. 9; xxiii., xxiv., and a few short fragments in other chapters. To the Deuteronomist are assigned chapters i.; viii. 30–35; xi. 10–xiii. 14; xiv. 6–15, and some other small portions; while the remainder, including the greater part of the account of the division of the territory, comes from the priestly writer. Its geographical details are characterised by great vagueness, except as regards the portion of the land which was held by Jews after the exile. (*Chambers's Encyclopædia.*)

THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE BOOK.—The chronological dates presented in this book are few. 1. We are informed (iv. 19) that the passage of the Jordan took place "on the tenth day of the first month." The year is not specified, but would seem to have been the fortieth after the exodus. Thus, if the date of the exodus be assumed to be B.C. 1490 that of the invasion of Canaan will be B.C. 1450. 2. The duration of Joshua's wars with the Canaanites is spoken of loosely in xi. 18, as "many days." Inferences can, however, be drawn from the words of Caleb (xiv. 7, 10), which enable us to determine this point with some approach to definiteness. Caleb speaks of himself as forty years old when he was sent by Moses from Kadesh to spy out the land. When he came before Joshua to prefer his claim to Hebron, the conquest of Canaan was accomplished, and he was then eighty-five. Since the mission of the spies took place in the summer of the second

year after the exodus (Num. xiii. 20)—and the whole period from the exodus to the crossing of Jordan is estimated at forty years—it would appear that Caleb was thirty-eight years old when he passed through the Red Sea, and seventy-eight when he passed through Jordan. Thus a period of seven years is left for the campaigns of Joshua. Josephus, indeed (Ant. v. 1, 19), speaks of these wars as lasting only five years. The difference, however, is not great. Josephus himself speaks of five *complete* years as occupied by the conquest, and Caleb probably employed round numbers after the Hebrew mode. 3. The duration of Joshua's rule, and consequently the number of years covered by the records of this book, is far more uncertain. We have no definite information as to the age of Joshua at the date of the exodus, or indeed at any other period previous to his death when he was an hundred and ten (xxiv. 19). If, however, we suppose him to be of the same age as Caleb, a supposition probable in itself and supported by the expression used of him in Ex. xxxiii. 11 ("a young man"), he will have been about seventy-eight years old when he invaded Canaan, and have been at the head of Israel not much less than thirty-two years altogether after the death of Moses. Or if we assume seven years for the wars against the Canaanites, he will have survived about twenty-five years after his retirement to Timnath-serah. This accords sufficiently well with the notice (xxiii. 1) which places the parting words and acts of Joshua "a long time after that the Lord had given rest unto Israel from all their enemies round about." Josephus, however (Ant. v. 1, 29), states that Joshua's rule after the death of Moses lasted for twenty-five years, and that he had previously been forty years associated with Moses. This would fix Joshua's age at the time of the exodus at forty-five, an age perhaps hardly so suitable as thirty-eight to the language of Ex. xxxiii. 11. Ewald, Fürst, and others regard the statement of Josephus as probable, and as in all likelihood of ancient authority. Others (*e.g.*, Clem. Alex. "Strom." i. 21; Theoph. "Ad Autolyc." iii. 24) name twenty-seven years as the length of Joshua's government; while Eusebius ("Præpar. Evang." x. 14) states that some assigned thirty years to it. (*T. E. Espin, B.D.*)

THE OBJECT OF THE BOOK.—The object of the book is to magnify the inviolable covenant faithfulness of Jehovah in the fulfilment of His promises (xxi. 43–45), by the historical information as to the conquest by the covenant people of the land of Canaan promised to their fathers, and their inheritance of it (i. 2–6), through the Almighty assistance of Jehovah, under the guidance of Joshua, Moses' minister, who had been called to effect the accomplishment of the Divine promise, according to an appointment recorded in the law itself (Deut. xxxi. 7). (*Prof. C. F. Keil.*) The Book of Joshua is one of the most important writings in the Old Covenant, and should never be separated from the Pentateuch, of which it is at once both the continuation and completion. Between this book and the five books of Moses there is the same analogy as between the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. The four Gospels give an account of the transactions of Jesus Christ, the Christian legislature, just as the first five books of the Bible give, for the most part, of the doings of Moses, the Jewish legislator; and the Acts of the Apostles, as a book, bears the same relation to these Gospels as the Book of Joshua to the Pentateuch. (*Dr. A. Clarke.*)

THE CONTENTS OF THE BOOK.—It falls into three great divisions:—1. The conquest of the land (i.–xii.). This part is historical, both in form and substance. It relates the main operations by which the people under Joshua obtained possession of Canaan. The chief points are: The sending of the spies and the crossing of the Jordan (ii.–iv.); the fall of Jericho (v. 13–vi. 27); the capture (after a reverse) of Ai (vii.–viii. 29); the treaty with the Gibeonites (ix.); the defeat of the leagued kings of the south at the battle of Beth-horon (x.); and the defeat of a similar confederacy in the north near the waters of Merom (xi.). It is obvious that many details are omitted, for a long list of conquered kings is given at the close (xii.); and it is stated (xi. 18) that "Joshua made war a long time with all those kings." Yet the narrator makes it particularly clear that it is a holy war he is describing, for he tells us of the miraculous manner in which the Jordan was crossed (iii.); describes the observance of the Passover (v. 2–12); dwells upon the sin of Achan as the cause of the reverse at Ai (vii.); and relates the confirming of the Covenant at Ebal and Gerizim (viii. 30–35). 2. The partition of the land (xiii.–xxii.). This part, while historical in form, is topographical and legislative in contents. Here the main points are: After a sketch of the land to be divided (xiii. 1–7), and of the

territory already assigned to the tribes east of the Jordon (xiii. 8–33), Hebron is given to Caleb (xiv. 6–15), and the three tribes, Judah, Ephraim, and half Manasseh, receive their portions in the western territory (xv.–xvii.). Afterwards, the Tabernacle being set up, the remaining tribes, except Levi, receive theirs (xviii.–xix. 48), a special inheritance being assigned to Joshua (xix. 49–51); the cities of refuge and the cities of the Levites are set apart; and the two tribes and a half who had assisted in the conquest are sent to their homes (xx.–xxii.). Here again, while the details are very unequal, the sacred character of all the proceedings is clearly indicated. The inheritances are distributed by lot (xiv. 2; xviii. 6, 10), the cities of refuge and the Levitical territory have a religious reference (xx.–xxi.), and the jealousy of the people for national unity of religion is shown in the matter of the altar Ed (xxii. 10–34). 3. The leader's farewell (xxiii., xxiv.). This part is mostly hortatory. Joshua warns the people against idolatry, renews the Covenant with solemn ceremony, and incorporates a record of the transaction in the Book of the Law. The book closes with an account of the death and burial of Joshua and of Eleazar (xxiv. 29–33). (*Prof. Jas. Robertson.*)

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JOSHUA.

CHAPTER I.

Vers. 1–9. Now after the death of Moses . . . the Lord spake unto Joshua.—*The death of the old lawgiver* :—I. The death of Moses was ushered in by no decay. In this respect it was a striking exception to the rule. His mental vigour was unimpaired when he passed away. We have evidence of this in that wonderful book of Deuteronomy, which Jesus loved to ponder and to quote. Witness also the grand swan-song into which he bursts before its close, pouring forth the sum and substance of all his warnings and exhortations in a flood of molten emotion. Witness the beatitudes that follow, wherein the seer pierces with prophetic eye the dark future and perceives the final consummation, when Jehovah shall remove all iniquity from Israel and write His law upon their hearts. Surely such exercises as these betoken a mind in a state of the highest vigour and activity. And as it was with the mind so was it with the body. Moses had no look of a dying man as he left the camp and climbed to Nebo's brow; no painful and protracted illness, no decrepit old age. What a blessed exodus was this; more a translation than a death. An active, useful, holy life; a speedy death—could there be a greater blessing if we have to die? II. The death of Moses was embittered by no regret. Moses was not dragged up that hill unwillingly, like a malefactor to his doom. There was no indulgence in rebellious sentiment and anxiety; no nervous and fearful activity in winding up the affairs of life; but contrariwise, there was profound, calm, and courageous submission to the Divine will. In good time let us honestly face all the possible sorrow and disappointment, and learn, like him, to overcome through faith, obedience, and humility. III. His death was darkened by no dismay. Of all the multitude in Israel that loved him, not one was with him. Alone, alone, alone, he has passed into the presence of his Maker. Yes, and we too, whatever the circumstances of our end, however tender and unsleeping the ministry of loving hearts and gentle hands that soothes our dying moments, alone must enter death's dark door and be ushered into the presence of our God. Alone, yet not unfriended, if we know Jesus who is there; alone, yet undismayed, if like Moses we trust in Him, for He has said, "I will be with thee." IV. The death of Moses was brightened by great consolation. (*A. B. Mackay.*) *Death enters into God's plans* :—Joshua must succeed Moses and be God's servant as he was. He must aim at this as the one distinction of his life; he must seek in every action to know what God would have him to do. Happy man if he can carry out this ideal of life! No conflicting interests or passions will distract his soul. The power that nerves his arm will not be more remarkable than the peace that dwells in his soul. He will show to all future generations the power of a "lost will," not the suppression of all desire, according to the Buddhist's idea of bliss, but all lawful natural desires in happy and harmonious action, because subject to the wise, holy, and loving guidance of the will of God. Thus we see among the other paradoxes of His government how God uses death to promote life. The death of the eminent, the aged, the men of brilliant gifts makes way for others, and stimulates their activity and growth. When the champion of the forest falls the younger trees around it are brought more into contact with the sunshine and fresh air, and push up into taller and more

fully developed forms. In many ways death enters into God's plans. Not only does it make way for the younger men, but it has a solemnizing and quickening effect on all who are not hardened and dulled by the wear and tear of life. What a memorable event in the spiritual history of families is the first sudden affliction, the first breach in the circle of loving hearts! First, the new experience of intense tender longing, baffled by the inexorable conditions of death; then the vivid vision of eternity, the reality of the unseen flashing on them with living and awful power, and giving an immeasurable importance to the question of salvation; then the drawing closer to one another, the forswearing of all animosities and jealousies, the cordial desire for unbroken peace and constant co-operation; and if it be the father or the mother that has been taken, the ambition to be useful—to be a help, not a burden, to the surviving parent, and to do what little they can of what used to be their father's or their mother's work. Death becomes actually a quickener of the vital energies; instead of a withering influence, it drops like the gentle dew, and becomes the minister of life. (*W. G. Blaikie, D.D.*) *Death makes room for others*:—And some great names must be removed to make way for lesser names that have growing sap in them and real capability of beneficent expansion. Some great trees must be cut down to make room for lesser trees that mean to be great ones in their time. We owe much to the cutting-down power of death, the clearing power of the cruel scythe or axe. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Onward, through, and over*:—Moses was dead. His work was done. It was rounded off so far as he was concerned, and so he went to his reward. There is a lesson of no small importance to you and me. Our business is to do the duty that lies next us. That duty may only seem to be a fragment of what we desire to accomplish, but it is all we are answerable for, and to do our portion well is to stand clear with conscience and with God. In the construction of a door, one man makes the panels, another makes the frame, another fits it together, and a fourth hangs it by its hinges. The panel maker has a very imperfect portion of the work to show as the result of his toil, but he has done his part and fulfilled his mission whether the door ever swings in its place or no. Your business and mine is to fulfil the injunction, whether in our daily toil, in the training of our children, in the work of the Church or whatever other duty may fall to us—"Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." Our hearts may find to do a good deal more; if our hand cannot find the opportunity to work out the heart's desire, we are accepted for what we have done and what we would do and cannot; and whatever and how-much-soever remains undone, we shall ascend, like Moses, to our own Mount Nebo and die in a flood of rosy light with Canaan before our eyes and God's "Well done" sounding in our ears. The man who carries the hod of mortar up the ladder does not lay a single brick, but in his measure his service is essential and as worthy as the architect that planned the building, or the mason that rears its walls. From this point of view, servant is a grander name than seraph or archangel, for what would these be if they did not serve or stand and wait? Their wings would droop and their celestial glory would be quenched in night. "Moses' minister." That is what Joshua is called. It is another word for servant. He ministered to, that is, he served Moses; and herein lies another lesson, for he was thereby a servant also of the Lord. He who well serves the Lord's servant serves that servant's Master, and He says, "Ye did it unto Me." Oh for a full and perfect measure of this rich interchange, this interlinking of lives and sympathies, servants of each other, vying in a holy rivalry as to who shall be the lowliest, readiest, willingest servant of the servants of the Lord! "Spake to Joshua." Joshua was born when Moses was an exile and a stranger hidden for his life among the wilds of Midian. There's another lesson of great value in this. It did not seem likely then, did it? that Moses should ever be a leader of men, the emancipator of a nation. Providence sees and plans for a long time ahead of our to-day, and holds in reserve agents and forces that we cannot see; and because we cannot see them we doubt and question and in the face of the unlikely we say, "It cannot be." That solitary pale-faced and half-starved monk in a German cell; how is he to shake all Europe and make the Pope tremble on his throne? There is nothing more unlikely: and yet Frederic, Prince of Saxony, is being placed by God upon his throne to be a ready and brave helper when the time came; and before Luther left his cell, Providence had sprung upon the world the printing press, which was to be Luther's deadliest artillery. God's plans are laid; His movements are in process, and for the fulfilment of every purpose that He cherisheth there shall come the hour and the man. Now mark, that this is true in our own individual history and experience. Every humble and

trustful disciple of the Lord Jesus is the ward of Divine Providence. Listen: "The God of my mercy shall prevent me"; that is, shall go before me. You look forward with an anxious eye and heart to some possible contingency, and say, "It is sure to happen." Time passes, and perhaps it does happen; but you find that meanwhile God hath stationed at that point something or somebody that acts as a buffer to the blow, and although your Moses may fail you at your need, some Joshua comes in to fill the gap and meet the need of the moment to the full. "Therefore arise." There is an old saying that there is much virtue in an "if"; it appears to me that there is much virtue in this word "therefore." Moses is dead, therefore arise. Remembering who Moses was and how entirely Moses was depended on, it would seem more natural to say, "Therefore lie still; this is a blow from which you cannot recover." When he was alive you often asked him to take you back to Egypt for safety's sake. Now that he is dead, you had better take yourselves back, for if you are not drowned in an attempt to pass the river, the Canaanites will dig your graves on the other side. Now is not that the kind of "therefore" with which the Church of God is sadly familiar, and with which those who have relationship with faint-hearted people have a saddening acquaintance? A stay and pillar of the Church dies or removes, "therefore nothing can be done; what can we do without him?" Here is a man who starts in business. Things do not advance as he wishes. He therefore must shut up his shop, be content to collapse. Surely that logic will be laughed at. Well, do not let us hear it in the Church; do not let us say it in presence of our obstacles. If the axe is blunt, grip it with both hands and put more strength into the blow. No fretting, no retreating, no conferring with doubts and fears. Is Moses dead? Therefore arise! Cross hands over the dead hero's coffin, and vow to Heaven to take his name as a new watchword, and to cross the Jordan while the earth is still fresh upon his grave. "Go over this Jordan." In measuring the chances of doing a thing you must take into account who orders it. It was Napoleon who said to the French army, "Go over the Alps." It would not have been done under anybody else's guidance. It was God that said to Joshua, "Go over this Jordan." Then though it be as deep as the sea, though it swirl like a whirlpool, though it rush like Niagara, he will go to yonder side. There is just one other lesson that I would fain gather from these suggestive words—"The land which I do give them." First, God had said to them while in Egypt, "The land which I will give them." Oh! what weary years of waiting followed! At last they had given it up. They said, "Where is the promise of His coming?" Then the lash of the taskmaster fell and silenced them. Now they are in sight of it, and He says, "The land which I do give them." The promise is in the very act of being fulfilled. By and by the waters parted and let them through, and, as they stand on the plains of Sharon, or lie at rest under the shadow of the hills of Lebanon, God says, "The land which I have given them!" Mark the tenses, how they change: "I will give, I do give, I have given." Men and brethren, that is God's order. He is faithful that promised. (*J. J. Wray.*)

Dignity of God's service:—The first graveyard which meets the eye in the Moravian cemetery of Herrnhut bears the inscription, "Christian David, the servant of the Lord." This was in life the high distinction of the humble and apostolic colleague of Count Zinzendorf, and was even recognised by the Imperial Council of Russia when the Moravian carpenter had occasion to appear before it. *Moses and Joshua:*—Moses' work ended at Jordan—Joshua's began at Jordan. History is vested in the life of its representative men, and has in it no gaps. The mantle of Elijah falls on Elisha, and the next generation was provided for before Moses went up into Nebo. Moses wanted to go over Jordan. It seemed to him, most likely, that he died before his time. And yet his work, as we can see it now, was a completed and a nicely-rounded one. His commission was to bring the Hebrews to the Jordan; Joshua's commission was to bring them over the Jordan and establish them in Canaan. We are to learn from such representative instances that when a man is interested in nothing but to do the work that God sets him, he will never die till the work is done thoroughly and successfully. Among the little servants of God there are no fallen buds, and among the adult servants of God no broken columns. (*C. H. Parkhurst, D.D.*) *The new leader:*—It has been said, "Great men have no successors." But if we mean by successor one who takes up the work where his predecessor has left it, and develops it according to the Divine ideal, then all men, great and small alike, have successors. As Pascal puts it, "You cannot produce the great man before his time, and you cannot make him die before his time; you cannot displace nor advance him, nor put him back; you

cannot continue his existence, and replace him, for he existed only because he had his work to do; he exists no longer, because there is no longer anything for him to do; and to continue him is to continue a useless part." A worthy successor to the great leader had been found. The Divine choice, a choice which had been revealed to Moses before his death, and which greatly gladdened his heart, had fallen upon Joshua. There were reasons for this choice of Joshua which we do well to consider; for if his preparation for this high place was not so romantic or so miraculous as that of Moses, it was none the less effective and Divine. His training was, like ours, of a more homely pattern. I. It can scarcely be doubted that JOSHUA'S LINEAGE had something to do with God's choice. His parents were slaves, and though the bloody edict enacted in Moses' infant days had long since been repealed, these serfs had felt to the full the bitterness of bondage. But notwithstanding all, they had not lost faith and hope in God; and we get a glimpse into their souls' state through the significant name they gave their firstborn. They called him "Hoshea," that is "Salvation." Surely their infant's name is the very echo of their father Jacob's dying words to Dan, "I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord." We can well believe that Joshua was brought up in an atmosphere of hope. It is more than likely, from what we know of the habits of the ancient Egyptians, that in a corner of his father's lowly dwelling stood an object which often excited his childish wonder and curiosity. It was a mummy case, painted all over with strange devices and curious figures, which with its somewhat faded richness presented a strange contrast to the mean furniture of the dwelling. "Within it," we can easily imagine his mother telling him, "are preserved the bones of Joseph." "But why do you keep Joseph's bones?" "Because when he lay dying he gave commandment concerning them," &c. The child would listen and ponder, and look with new solemnity on that sacred trust; then he might ask, "Mother, was that true which Joseph said when he was dying?" "Yes, my boy." "Then why do we not go at once—

> "'Mother, oh where is that blissful shore,
> Shall we not seek it and weep no more'?"

"We must wait God's time. We are His people, and He knows what is best." "Will it be long till that day comes?" "I cannot tell, but I do not think it will be very long, for God said to our great father Abraham that we would go back to it in the fourth generation, and the time must be near." Thus the influences that surrounded Joshua in his youth must have moulded his character and prepared him for the place he took, first as Moses' lieutenant, then as leader of Israel; and the assurance of the truth of Joseph's dying words must have mollified the bitterness of that cruel bondage. Every visitation of judgment would be a confirmation of his faith, and every trial a purifying furnace to remove his dross. He would hear from his father and grandfather, who were elders of the important tribe of Ephraim, the precise particulars of the Divine commission, and while they, with the other elders, were under Moses and Aaron attending to the more difficult and important matters in connection with the proposed Exodus, it is very likely that, following his natural bent of mind, he would be actively employed in attempting to organise the people and prepare them for a simultaneous movement. Thus while this champion first steps into the arena when Israel confronts Amalek, we may well suppose that he had done yeoman's service before, and his fitness and aptness for his life's work must have depended in great measure on home surroundings. II. JOSHUA'S CHARACTER had also to do with this choice. Its constituent elements were noble and simple, easily understood and readily appreciated. He was every inch a soldier, brave and manly, simple in habit, straightforward in speech, cool-headed, warm-hearted, energetic, swift in thought and action. He was firm as a rock, true as steel. Nothing could exceed his fidelity. How true was he, above all, to his God! So was he with his master. He never failed Moses. At all times he was jealous for his honour, and would tolerate nothing derogatory to his dignity and authority. He was even true to his enemies. He kept his word and carried out his engagements, in the spirit as well as the letter, though trapped by guile into the making of them. His courage also was of the loftiest kind. It could face not only enemies, but, harder far, misguided friends. Like all noble natures, Joshua was also unselfish, humble, and modest. He had learned to obey, and was therefore fit to command. His patience and hopefulness were also very marked, and much needed in the leader of such a people as Israel. He was able to endure the fatigues of the march as well as the rush of battle, not fainting under the hardships of the weary campaign, but ever

on the alert to push every advantage to its utmost limit, and always, by his cheerful bearing and cheery words, keeping up the hearts of the people. He was a leader alert, circumspect, prudent, leaving nothing to chance or the chapter of happy accidents, but doing everything that foresight could suggest for the attainment of the end in view. III. JOSHUA'S TRAINING had also to do with this choice. When he was put at the head of the people he was no novice. Joshua was the oldest man in the camp with the single exception of Caleb; therefore he was a man of experience and ripened wisdom. We have already spoken about that home school, in which his parents were the teachers. This was the granitic foundation of all his subsequent greatness. He was also taught in the grand and stirring school of the Exodus. Here God Himself was Joshua's teacher. Great national events have a high educational value. The stimulus of stirring times is deep, formative, and all pervasive. Still another school furnished Joshua with valuable instruction, and that was the camp of Israel. If by the wonders of the Exodus he was taught to know God, by the conduct of Israel he would learn to know man. Day by day he would be learning how to command and lead. And without doubt the crowning lessons in this long preparatory course would be imparted in the tent of Moses. Moses' tent was Joshua's college. And the very fact that he had been associated so long with Moses as his lieutenant would not only prepare himself but also the minds of the people for this change. IV. This choice of Joshua had also reference to the CHARACTER OF THE WORK that had to be done. The great work now before Israel is to conquer and divide the land. This was a kind of work most congenial to Joshua, and for which he had received special preparation. He is the right man for the present work, as Moses was the right man for the past. V. Also, this significant choice had reference to the GREAT PLAN OF GOD in the economy of redemption. "Moses My servant is dead." Thus said Jehovah. Therefore Moses brought no one into the inheritance. Israel lost sight of him for ever, before they put down a foot in Canaan. If they are to pass over that Jordan, and possess the land, it cannot be under Moses. This act of leadership is deliberately taken out of his hands by God Himself. Surely the lesson is plain to all who know the essence of the gospel. "By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in His sight." The law brings no one into God's heritage. But what Moses could not do Joshua was raised up to accomplish. If we would enter into God's inheritance we must turn from Moses and look to Joshua. Who was he? A man in all points made like his brethren; not nurtured in Pharaoh's palace like Moses, but born with them in Goshen, sharing their burdens, labouring side by side with them, afflicted in all their afflictions, bearing their griefs and carrying their sorrows. Who cannot see here a picture of God's own Son, "made of a woman, made under the law"? Turn from the law to the gospel. What is your hope of glory, Moses or Jesus? Yet we must never dream that Moses and Joshua are antagonistic. There is no quarrel in God's economies. Just as Moses and Joshua wrought together for the same great end, so is it with the law and the gospel. (*A. B. Mackay.*) *Whom do I succeed?*—Every age succeeds an age marked by greatness peculiarly its own. We are born now into a grand civilisation; it admits of no indolence, or reluctance as to work, and it cannot be satisfied by what is petty, perfunctory, and inexpensive as to the strength which is laid out upon it. History brings its responsibilities. To be born immediately after such and such leaders have played their part in the world's theatre is itself to have a cross of no mean weight laid upon the shoulder. We may close our eyes and think nothing about these things, but we do not thereby make them the less realities, nor do we thereby destroy the standard of judgment which they force upon us and by which our life will be tested. Every man should say, "Whom do I succeed? Whose are these footprints near the place whereon I stand? Has a giant been here—a great leader, a noble sufferer, a patient student, a father great in love, a mother greater still?—then my responsibility begins with their greatness and goodness; what I have to do," the soliloquist should say, "is to go on: where they have been great, I must try to be greater still—or if not along their line, along some line of my own—so that the ages may not stagger backwards, but with steadiness and majesty of strength advance from one degree to another as the light increases to the perfect day." (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Promotion*:—When a merchant has a vacancy in his establishment, he promotes to it that one of his servants who in the post which he has been occupying has displayed the greatest measure of fidelity and perseverance; and, when a youth applies for a situation, the success of his application will depend on the report which his former employer gives regarding him or on the record which he has written for himself in school. But it

is not otherwise in the providence of God. Those who fill best the spheres in which they have been placed are, in general, those who are in the long run advanced to higher positions; while they who despise the small things of their present duties are left to sink into still deeper obscurity. (*Christian World Pulpit.*) *Death and its lessons:*—The man to whom the charge is addressed is the inferior, in every way, of his master. A good man, a brave soldier, a disinterested head of the State—this he is. But the zest and the sparkle has gone out of the history with Moses; the passage of the river is a feeble repetition of the passage of the sea; and the scene to which it admits Israel is one, for the most part, of comparatively "common day"—alternations of fighting and resting, victories imperfectly followed up, acquiescences, languid and faithless, in a virtual partition of Canaan between Israel and Israel's foe. It is the more lifelike as a picture of the fortunes of our race. It is thus that earth's history is written, it is thus that the stream of time flows on. The Moses is followed by the Joshua, the morning of promise by the noonday of disappointment, both alike pointing onward, onward still, to a sunset long delayed, and an evening time which shall at last be light. The hero of strategy or prowess—the genius of discovery or imagination—the prophet of earth or heaven—lives not to reap, leaves the harvest to another, looks abroad from his Pisgah upon worlds unconquered, feels at last that he rather stops the onward march of a generation whose turn is come. It is well. Man must be little if he would be great—must see himself but an atom in the universe of life if he would do anything that is real in the work which is all God's. And he has his reward. The man that "knows the blessedness of being little" is disembarrassed of the self-consciousness which is battling to be great. That energy is all free for action which loses no time in contemplating itself. That "ability" grows apace in vigour which remembers that it is of "God's giving." It was so with Moses. His one prayer was, "Let the God of the spirits of all flesh set a man over His congregation." Upon him, when he was found, he laid his hand, presented him instantly to the congregation as the man of the future, and "put some of his own honour at once upon him, that the congregation might understand and be obedient." He has his reward. This it is which eases life of its carefulness. This it is which makes greatness endurable as well as possible—the thought that God has no need of it, can raise up even from the stones a workman and a patriot, metes not with man's measure and reckons not by man's years. "I am the Lord, I change not"; therefore ye sons of men can both quietly serve and peacefully fall on sleep. "Moses My servant is dead." Yes, "My servant," though he once "spake unadvisedly"; yes, "My servant," though he was refused his heart's prayer; yes, "My servant," though he might not go over Jordan. "Moses My servant is dead": even when we are judged, we are but chastened; yea, if we not only suffer for our sins, but even sleep! "Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan." The work of God is not ended. Rather are we always on the brink of a river that must be crossed, and in sight of a land that has to be conquered. Who can look around him on the face of this earth, and so much as dream that Jordan is crossed, that Canaan is occupied? Who could live this life if he did not feel and know that effort, that progress, is its law? What we look forth upon, from the spot which is "this present," is a work, and it is a warfare. With our guides or without them, it is quite evident that there rolls a deep and a rapid river between us and rest, between us and a land of promise, which is that new heaven and earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. We cannot pretend to say that intelligence such as we possess, that civilisation such as we have attained, that religion such as a Christendom realises, is satisfactory, is successful, is victorious, whether in the aspect of happiness or in the aspect of good. Everything is in conflict, everything is in struggle, everything is (at best) in a condition of movement and in a condition of hope. The plain of Moab is our world—a cold, broad stream divides us from anything that we can call rest, from anything that we can call possession. "My servant is dead, now therefore arise, and go over." There is a vacancy, which you must fill. That is one lesson of death. It is a summons to the living. God has lost a workman—will you take his place? Terrible would it be for this nation if either growing luxury or spreading vice should diminish the supply of strong men for the carrying on of the work of God in England. It is not the decay of genius which is formidable—it is the decay of strength. Joshua was (in many senses) the inferior of Moses, but that inferiority was no loss, on the whole, to his country; he had his work, as Moses had his—and, like Moses, he did it. "My servant is dead; therefore arise and go over." If there is a call in death, there is also an

encouragement. See, it says to us, what life is. See the blessedness of God's service. Hear Him say of the departed, "My servant" still. The man who has served God in his generation shall never die. He is in the hands of God, though it be out of the sight of the living. "My servant is dead; arise therefore, and go over," whither he, we trust, is gone. In the words of the historic parable of Ascension Day, "Take ye up the mantle that fell from him, and with it smite the waters—that, like him, and after him, you in your turn may pass over dryshod." (*Dean Vaughan.*) Arise, go over this Jordan.—*The campaign commenced:*—I. WHAT THE LORD SPAKE UNTO JOSHUA; OR, THE ISSUE OF THE ORDER. Never was a mightier task assigned to any man than to Joshua; and yet never did any man start forth better equipped than he, for observe, the Lord gives him—(1) An express warrant; (2) glorious and gracious promises; (3) hearty encouragement; (4) clear directions. II. WHAT JOSHUA COMMANDED THE PEOPLE; OR, HIS PROCLAMATION OF THE LORD'S ORDER. 1. His obedience is prompt and unquestioning. No "wherewith" is interposed; no sign asked. He does not pause or procrastinate, but "then" (ver. 10) and there, like a man of activity, he issues the order to the tribes through their officers, bidding the people at once prepare them victuals for the journey; yea, strong in faith, and full of the Holy Ghost, he announces that "within three days" they are to cross the Jordan. 2. As Joshua's obedience was prompt, so was it thorough. He will not do God's work by halves, nor go to war without all the army. III. WHAT THE PEOPLE ANSWERED JOSHUA; OR, THEIR ACCEPTANCE OF THE LORD'S ORDER. "Only be strong, and of good courage"! They indicate that Joshua had rehearsed in their ears the charge that God had given him. The key to their import is found in the clause, "thou and all this people" (ver. 2). They recognise their union with their captain. Thus their exhortation may be regarded as an echo, and an acceptance of the call to effort and endurance. Lessons: 1. There is great encouragement here for all who, like Joshua, are called to occupy posts of authority, responsibility, or difficulty. 2. The same consolation belongs to every Christian. We all have a warfare to accomplish, a Jordan to pass over, an inheritance to seek. The call of God, the promises of God, and the presence of God are our warrant. 3. A deeper lesson remains, respecting the office of Jesus. He is the Captain of the Lord's host. (*G. W. Butler, M.A.*) *Joshua successor to Moses:*—1. Every man who is doing anything worth working at is some one's successor, and in time must be succeeded by some one. Alas for the man who succeeds only to a place to occupy, and not to a work to do! Joshua was successor to a grand man in a wonderful work. 2. Every man's work is a continuation. "The workmen die, but the work goes on." 3. Every man's work is his own. It differs from that of him who went before, and of him who will come after. Moses had been trained in Pharaoh's court and among Jethro's flock; Joshua in the brickyards of Egypt and in the army of Israel. Each had been fitted for the work he was to do. And every man's work is shaped by that of his predecessor. I. GOD GIVES MEN DEFINITE WORK TO DO. It is important that you know your vocation. God has called you to His likeness and His service; to be as Christ was in the world, with His mind in you and His work upon your hands; to manifest the Father to men, and to lead men to the Father. It is your definite work, your one great aim as Christians, as God's children, whether you accept it or not—your only worthy aim. II. A DEFINITE WORK DEMANDS AN EQUALLY DEFINITE LAW. If the work be given, the law for its prosecution must be given also from the same source. God has been good to His people in perpetuating for them the written Word, enlarged and modified for their changing conditions. The object-lessons, which were needed in the childhood of the race, gave way to the precepts which might better guide its youth; and these in turn yielded to the statement of the great principles of all right feeling and conduct, with the declaration of which the canon is closed, and which need no addition, because they are adaptable to every variety of condition and culture. III. A DIVINE HELPER. When the Lord gives a man a work to do which is beyond his power, He always promises the needed aid. "Go over this Jordan, and divide this land among My people," says the Lord; but God says also, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee. I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." But, beside the promise of a Divine Helper, Joshua had both the vision of His person and the experience of His aid. We, too, may listen, and hear the promise coupled with the command. We also may look up and see, not in vision, but in the mirror of His Word, the Captain of our salvation, the Lord of war and righteousness, armed for our defence, at hand for our deliverance. No life is worth the living unless it sets before itself a work worthy to be done. No life can do a worthy work save as

it recognises the Divine law, and avails itself of the Divine Helper. With these three outward conditions of his success, there needed one quality on Joshua's part to make it sure, and that was—IV. A BRAVE HEART. But the courage came from his confidence in the Divine mission, the Divine law, and the Divine Helper. So, too, may it be for us all. If we know that the Lord our God is with us, we shall not be afraid nor dismayed; but we too shall be prospered, and shall have good success. (*Sermons by the Monday Club.*) *The commission of Joshua*:—I. THE DIVINE COMMISSION IS GIVEN TO MEN WHO ARE PECULIARLY FITTED FOR THE WORK. In one respect all men are weak; but in their weakness they must not be weaklings. God can use all men; but He never calls one to a burden that is beyond his ability to carry. Man must become worthy or willing before God will commission him to any work. God cannot make much of any man who does not make much of himself. We too often speak as if God gives man his character; it is all wrong. By Divine help every man makes himself and develops his own powers, for the exercise or misuse of which he alone is responsible. It is every man's privilege to be worthy of receiving the Divine call. II. THE SOURCE OF ALL STRENGTH IS GOD. 1. God wants strong men. There is no strength without symmetry. Samson's strength was counterbalanced by his moral weakness. Benedict Arnold ranked among the nation's heroes at Ticonderoga, but the lurking perfidy of his heart betrayed the traitor at last. The intellectual brilliancy of an Aaron Burr could not raise him to any greatness so long as his moral nature was corrupt. Washington was as great a power in national affairs on account of his moral nature as from his civic deeds; so of Lincoln and Grant. 2. All strength springs from within. You cannot make any man stronger than he is. Place him in favouring circumstances, but these cannot control him, except as they mark his weakness. You may bolster men, but this gives no manhood; may extol them above their deserts, but all the puffs of adulation make them no stronger. The whole world cannot make any man to be worth more than he is in himself. This strength is possible to all. Take away bodily fear, or timidity as to others' opinions, and every man can be strong. There is no sight more sublime than man enduring the flames that scorch him in the path of duty; mightier than the mighty rebukes of millions as he walks alone; undismayed, as Christlike he stands with some repentant child of sin, for Christ's sake. The "image of God" can surpass in sublimity and divinity all else the world has ever seen, because the measure of the obstacles he overcomes marks the heroism of his own soul. 3. God promises help in thus gaining strength. What power in the words: "As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee," &c. Stronger yet the promise: "The Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." There is no strength without God. Power comes only when the watchward is "Immanuel." "I can do all things," &c. There is no truly great man who is ungodly. It takes a great hope to give great courage. III. THEY WHOSE STRENGTH IS IN GOD ARE INVINCIBLE. There is no such bulwark as the truth; no such power as comes from the consciousness of doing right. There is no such strength as the man possesses whose conscience is clear. One such man can chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight. It is not necessary for men with truth on their side to take up the world's methods in their plans and plottings. Men in whom God dwells are as truly unharmed by evil as they are by the storms that can do no more than wet their cheeks. The world cannot crush God's children; it can crown with thorns, but it cannot, with all its might, cast off from memory the crown of the just. It can build bonfires, make dungeons, and sharpen sabres, but it cannot weaken the joys that count all these only as symbols of their swift entrance upon a better life. IV. THE BOUNDS OF ALL SUCCESSFUL SERVICE ARE IN THE WRITTEN WORD. So far as history has a voice, God has never left Himself without a witness of His truth. Sinai's law was but the expression of principles long before partially known. Twice in the record of this commission of Joshua the condition of prosperity is given as obedience "to all the law" made known through Moses: "Turn not from it to the right hand or to the left," &c. It was this same law that should never depart out of his mouth; day and night he should meditate upon its precepts, and watch closely "to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous," &c. The truth of this grand principle has been stamped upon the world wherever civilisation has gained a hold. (*David O. Mears.*) *Taking possession of our inheritance*:—I. TAKE A SURVEY OF THE INHERITANCE. 1. I would say of this inheritance which God has prepared for His saints, and has

given to them by a covenant of salt, that it is exceeding broad. All that we can think or desire is ours in the covenant of grace. There are immeasurable breadths and lengths, but we confine ourselves to close quarters. Truly "there is very much land yet to be possessed"! Some graces you must have, or you are not saved; some sins must at once be driven out of your life at the sword's point, or you are not the Lord's. As for the choicer graces, you are foolish indeed if you think of doing without them; and as for the less violent sins, you err greatly if you spare one of them. 2. This heritage is exceedingly desirable. When sin is driven out, and we come to live in God's own land, then we find precious treasure; we dig, and we are enriched. We have all things in Christ; yea, in Him we have all that our utmost want can require. 3. This heritage, upon which we are now looking down from the summit of our faith, is full of variety. Here are Hermons of experience, Tabors of communion, Jabboks of prevailing prayer, and Cheriths of Divine providence. The revelation of God is a blessed country, full of all manner of delights. They that live in Christ dwell in spiritual realms, which for light and joy are as heaven below. Above all things, it is "Thy land, O Immanuel"! II. GLANCE AT THE TITLE DEEDS OF OUR INHERITANCE. I would not mind exhibiting our title before the whole bench of judges, for it has no flaw in it, and will stand in the highest court. 1. First, notice its covenant character: "I have given it to you." You will find the full conveyance in Gen. xv. 18–21. Each believer may say, "He hath in Christ Jesus made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; and therefore do I possess all spiritual blessings, and shall possess them world without end." 2. Observe, next, that this deed of gift is notable for its graciousness. How does it run? Which I do "sell" to them? Ah, no! It is no sale, but a free gift. 3. Note well the righteousness of our title: "Which I do give to them." The Lord God has a right to give what He pleases, for "the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof, the world, and they that dwell therein." Of His own has He given unto us. In the great sacrifice of His dear Son He has satisfied all claims of justice, and He acts justly when He blesses largely those for whom Jesus died. 4. Do not fail to see its sureness: "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance." "I do give," saith He, and thus He stands to His act and deed. Oh, children of God, what do you think of your title-deeds? You stand possessed of your kingdom by the gift of Him who has a right to give what He pleases. The kingdom is given you because it is your Father's good pleasure to give it to you. Not only was it His good pleasure, but it remains so. What great simpletons we are if we do not take possession of the brave country which is ceded to us! III. LET US MAKE A MOVE TOWARDS OUR POSSESSIONS. There is your land, but Jordan rolls between. 1. The first thing to do in this matter is to go over this Jordan. Come out from the world, and be separate. The land of gracious experience is meant for you to dwell in, so that you may be recognised as the Lord's peculiar people, separated unto the Most High. Oh, for that decisive step by which, like Abraham, you come out from your father's house that you may be a sojourner with God in the land which His grace will show you! 2. Having decided for the Lord, you are next to take possession by an act of simple faith. Every place in the grace country upon which the sole of your foot shall tread is yours. You will remember that the Red Indians agreed to sell to William Penn as much land as a man could walk round in a day; and I do not wonder that at the end of the day they complained that the white brother had made a big walk. I think I should have put my best leg foremost if whatever I could put my foot upon would be mine; would not you? Why, then, do you not hurry up in spiritual matters? Do you value earthly things more than spiritual? Mark, then, that if you put your foot down upon a blessing, and say, "This is mine," it is yours. What a very simple operation is the claim of faith! (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) **Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you.**—*The commission for the conquest*:—I. IT WAS DIVINE. It is important to bear this in mind, otherwise we shall misunderstand not only the whole teaching of this book, but the whole history of Israel as a nation. "Deus vult" is written on every page, however stained with blood. Joshua was no bandit or freebooter, eager for plunder; no Alexander or Napoleon, consumed by the lust of power and the greed of empire. He was simply a servant, carrying out the commands of a superior. And in truth there was a Divine necessity for this commission. If the Divine purposes are to be carried out, if He is to keep His place as the Judge of all the earth, some such commission was a necessity. Is there anything analogous to this in the spiritual sphere? There is. God does not

in these days call the Christian to any war such as that to which He called Joshua; yet there is a holy war, a glorious crusade, in which He would have us all warriors. Before every one of us He places a double battlefield. There is an outer fight, and the field of battle is the whole world, according to the gospel commission, "Go ye into all the world," &c. There is also an inner fight, and the field of battle is the heart, according to that holy exhortation which urges us to bring every thought into subjection to the Lord Jesus. III. IT WAS CLEAR IN ITS TERMS. No doubt could arise in the mind of Joshua as to what God desired him to do. "Arise"! The wilderness journey is at an end; the time to take possession has come. Arise from these weary disciplinary wanderings to high and heroic achievements. Even so our commission as Christians for our twofold fight is clear as day, and as emphatic as the Divine lips could make it. Therefore the removal of every valiant soldier of the Cross should be a mighty stimulus to those left behind. We best revere the memory of the good and great who have passed away by giving all diligence to the work which was so dear to them. III. IT WAS DIFFICULT TO CARRY OUT. "Go over this Jordan." Joshua is here put in as great extremity as was Moses at the Red Sea. Aye, and the crossing of the Jordan is only the first great difficulty among many. Often, in like manner, obedience to the gospel commission implies the facing of difficulties which to the eye of sense are insuperable. The fight of faith is never easy. IV. IT WAS TERRIBLE IN ITS CONSEQUENCES. When we think of its bearing on these Canaanites, we can conceive nothing more appalling. These nations were like the grass of the field, and Israel was God's scythe to cut them down. What a contrast to all this have we in the commission of the gospel and the present work of the Lord Jesus. When on earth He said, "I came not to destroy men's lives but to save them," and the work He has given His followers now to do is a work of salvation. Surely, then, we should be all the more eager to carry it out. V. IT WAS ALSO RIGHTEOUS. In this case nothing was done in undue haste. The Divine patience that had borne with these evil tenants for four hundred years was marvellous; and they grew worse and worse all the time. The gracious pause of forty years, after He had made bare His mighty arm before all flesh, by the wonders done in Zoan's field, and proclaimed that the time had come when He was to give this land to Israel, should have won submission. If now they resist His action, it is at their peril. If the war in which Joshua was engaged was righteous, how holy is that war by which righteousness and peace, joy and goodwill, are multiplied on the earth. The man who consecrates all his faculties to the downfall of evil, first within and then without, whose life is one long struggle against spiritual wickedness, acts according to the principles of eternal rectitude. VI. IT WAS BENEFICIAL IN ITS RESULTS. He who reads history cannot fail to see that impure and enfeebled races and nations have been the prey of those who have been comparatively pure and strong; and thus, by conquest, take it all in all, civilisation has been advanced, and the state of the race as a whole ameliorated. Better a bad limb be cut off than the whole body mortify. Such national surgery may be terrible, but it is beneficial. In like manner, by unflinching valour in the fight of faith, the children of God become the world's best benefactors. In conquering evil within and without, we not only do good to ourselves but to the whole human race. "Ye are the salt of the earth." Without this preserving salt of Christlike souls how soon would the carcase become corrupt and the eagles of judgment alight. VII. IT HAD ALSO A WIDE REFERENCE AND A NARROW APPLICATION. It spoke of the country which stretched "from the wilderness and this Lebanon." Thus the inheritance of Israel embraced a territory of great richness, beauty, variety, and compactness. Yet while Joshua's commission embraced the whole land, the land became the possession of Israel only as it was subdued acre by acre. These ancient warriors had not only to take the title-deeds, but also to enter into possession. To do the first was easy; to do the second was hard. Even so is it with the Christian. He has indeed a goodly heritage—a whole heaven of spiritual blessedness. "All things are yours." "Blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places." But we cannot enjoy one of these blessings apart from the conflict of faith. (*A. B. Mackay.*) *Ownership and possession:*—Here is a great promise with a sharp limitation: "Every place is yours—but every place only as you tread upon it, occupy, subdue, possess it." A most instructive parallel might be drawn between the subjugation of Palestine by Israel and the settlement of America by the English. In both cases tyranny at home had much to do with the movement, for the Stuarts of England and the Pharaohs of Egypt held essentially the same views of royal prerogative. In both cases the country was

already occupied by aborigines, and the free, wild life of the Jebusites and the Amorites was not unlike that of the Iroquois and Sioux Indians. In both cases the land was parcelled out before it was actually possessed. In both cases possession was achieved only through long and obstinate struggle with an enemy continually defeated, but stubbornly refusing to submit. According to the royal grants, Massachusetts and Virginia reached through to the Pacific Ocean. It required five minutes to draw the long parallels on the royal map; it needed two centuries actually to push civilisation across the continent, and the work is not yet finished. Ownership comes before possession, and is useless without it. The Divine giving is always done along this line. In dealing with the fields and the forests, God pours out sunshine and rain unasked, and the earth can only lie helpless, now flooded and now parched with heat. But in dealing with men made in His image, God's giving is a far finer and more subtle process. There is in it a wondrous delicacy that seems to fear refusal, that is busied chiefly with finding a place in which the gift is wanted. He gives us the title-deed, the motive-power, the strength, the gladness, and then says, "Enter and possess." We are all familiar with this in the intellectual realm. You put into your son's hand a Virgil or a Shakespeare. "Now," you say, "he has the works of Shakespeare, or Virgil." Has them?—he has the possibility, the opportunity! It is a great thing to have that; thousands have remained ignorant for want of that. But when you possess an author, the book in the hand will be only a subordinate affair. You will know the man himself; lines will flash out upon you at your toil, great sweet thoughts will recur in dreams, passages will intertwine with all your daily task, and when you possess Shakespeare, he will possess you. You give your son teachers and schools—there your power stops. You seat your daughter at the piano, but for musical power, culture, achievement—she must enter into and possess these, or she will for ever stand outside. You buy a home. The papers are signed, the deed is recorded; instantaneously the house is yours. But then comes the process of moving into it. Every season you move a little further in; through days of birth and bridal when the joy bells ring, through days of grief when all the bells are muffled, you are growing into that house, and when men ask, "Why don't you move up town?" you say, "My heart is here; this place I love." So Jesus Christ comes to a man at the entrance of Christian life, and puts him into ownership. "To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God." He bestows upon us the title-deeds unencumbered. He spreads before us a great territory, and says, "That is yours." Forgiveness for sins that are past, an inner quietness which naught can ruffle, a balm for life's hurts and bruises, a daily strength for daily needs, a courage that rises with obstacles and never knows defeat, all this is ours—if we will make it ours. Ours to possess, to enjoy, to experience. There is an old-fashioned phrase that had a deal of truth in it—"experiencing religion." A man has just as much religion as he has experienced; only when talking of our experience let us not go back twenty years—let us review the last twenty-four hours. How was it with me last evening? Was God last night in my soul, was I filled with serenity and courage and devotion to other souls, not twenty years ago, but last night? Our Bible is no larger than our reading of the Bible. Some men have a Bible consisting of a few Psalms and half a dozen chapters in the Gospels. Others have a Bible that is a patchwork of half-remembered texts, put together in childhood and now badly faded. A man with a rich, deep Christian experience cannot be content with a few threadbare chapters, he is ever reaching into new territory. So it is with the various great truths of the Christian religion—all are ours, but ours only as we possess them. The true use of a creed is not to set forth what men must believe, but to record what men do believe. And the man who is growing will find his creed growing too, growing indeed more simple, but growing stronger, and deeper, and broader. A grown man with a child's religion is like a man trying to content himself with nursery toys—he is soon disgusted with his attempt. But when a man is constantly moving onward, then one truth after another will reveal its inner meaning to his soul. We cannot expect that all truths will be equally precious in any one day. There is a rotation of crops in the spiritual life, and everything is "beautiful in his time." There is always one truth that shines brightest, as there is always one star on the meridian. Other stars will follow and culminate in their season. I think often with a strange awe of the first settlers of the Atlantic States, as they came across the sea, bearing the maps which gave them rights extending to the Pacific. This is just the condition of some of us to-day. The boundless possibilities of Christianity lie before us.

Jesus Christ comes to us saying, "It is all yours—a Christian life, a Christian death, a Christian heaven, it is yours if you will take it." And if we do not by voluntary act enter into what He offers, then the offer is to us absolutely worthless. The truth heard Sunday after Sunday is then only a genuine damage, making the heart each week less sensitive, less responsive—"it hardens all within and petrifies the feeling." But let us return to the text again. "Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon"—surely there is a hint here of the slow and toilsome process of spiritual acquisition. I do not hold out before any man a Christian life that is free from effort. Christianity at sight is always a delusion. At sight of Jesus we are indeed ushered into new relation and position. But then comes the path, sometimes winding through the shadow, sometimes leading straight uphill, always leading heavenward and always bright with an unseen Friend. So it is with the entire advance of the Church of Jesus Christ. Sometimes when we are impatient and fretful let us remember that here, too, walking is the normal movement. Why God doesn't convert India to-day is to us a mystery. That great movements should pace so slowly, and the advance be so measured and unequal, seems to us incomprehensible. One other suggestion is here—a hint that the farther a man travels the richer he becomes. Mountain range or lowly valley, forest or verdant meadow, whatsoever experience of God's love and grace we pass through, that is ours for ever. We learn more of man's weakness but more of God's power, and the more we truly know the gladder shall we really be. New experiences are to be ours, and the best is yet to come. (*W. H. P. Faunce.*)

Foothold:—There are many curious legends regarding the way in which land grants were given in former times. We read of one man who got from his king as much land as he could ride round while the king slept; of another who was granted as much land as could be covered by a bull's hide, which he cut into a continuous narrow strip, capable of enclosing a large area; of a third who was promised as much land as a bushel of barley would sow, which he was careful to sow as sparsely as possible, so that it might extend the borders of his farm to the utmost limits. At an annual fair, held in August, at the village of Carnwath, in Scotland, a foot-race is run as the tenure by which the property in the neighbourhood is held by the Lockhart family. The prize is a pair of red hose or stockings, and the proprietor used to have a messenger ready whenever the race was run to tell the result to the Lord Advocate of Scotland. In conformity with these ancient methods of land-measuring, God promised to Moses first, and renewed His promise to Joshua after the death of Moses, that He would give the Israelites every place that the sole of their foot should tread upon. It was a primitive custom to measure out the land that was to be cultivated or built upon by the foot; and a foot is still one of the terms of measurement among us derived from the human member. By primitive people the footprint was regarded as the symbol of possession, denoting that the land had been marked out by the foot of the individual, and so acquired as his own property. Some scholars derive the origin of the word "possession" itself from *pedis positio*, the position of the foot; and it was a maxim of the ancient jurists that whatever a person's foot touched was his. On the tombs of the ancient Romans, Christians and pagans alike, is often sculptured the symbol of a foot, to indicate that these tombs were the property of the persons who reposed in them. This primitive ceremony will also explain the allusion in Psalm cviii., where God speaks of dividing Shechem and meting out the valley of Succoth, casting His shoe over Edom, and triumphing over Philistia, and in this way taking possession for His people of the whole land of Canaan, while the Book of Ruth informs us that taking off the shoe from the foot signified the transfer or renunciation of property or of rights. (*H. Macmillan, D.D.*) *Something to be done to gain possession:*—In all primitive methods of allotting land—strange as some of them may appear to the modern legal mind—there was something to be done by the possessor himself in order to get possession. His tenure was made valid only by some personal act in connection with the property. He could not own a tract of land which he had not seen, as you might do in Australia, or New Zealand, or in the backwoods of America, although you were never there. It was necessary, in order that the land should become his, that he should do something in connection with it which implied a personal appropriation on the spot. This is the true significance of the curious antique rites by which persons got possession of land. They measured it with their feet, not only in marking it off, but also by passing frequently to and fro over its surface in ploughing and sowing, and all the other labours required for its cultivation, and thus literally obtained a foothold in it.

And the same principle holds good still, although these quaint archaic customs have long been discontinued. As regards the new lands in the colonies bestowed upon emigrants by Government, it is absolutely necessary that the persons to whom they are allotted should cultivate the ground and erect buildings on it in order to secure their right of possession. They cannot hold their lands merely upon paper, without ever coming near them, or doing anything to reclaim them from the wilderness. It is thus a universally recognised principle that the right of ownership of the earth is acquired by human labour, man bringing himself in some form or other into direct personal contact with the soil. This is the ultimate ground of ownership to which all can appeal. God gave Abraham the promise of possessing the Holy Land, but Abraham did not get the fulfilment of that promise by remaining in Ur of the Chaldees. He had to leave his home, journey over the wide intervening desert, and traverse on foot the land of promise from end to end. God intended the Israelites to measure out with their feet, and so take possession, according to immemorial custom, of the whole region from Lebanon to the desert, and from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates. But they stayed their feet, and actually measured only a little strip of land, which was parcelled out among the twelve tribes; while the Canaanites, the Philistines, and the Syrians, and all the desert tribes, were allowed, by the easy terms which the Israelites made with them, to possess in peace by far the largest part of the heritage of the chosen people. Even in the palmiest days of David and Solomon, when the possessions of the Israelites were most extensive, they never reached the limits which God had intended for them. The great lesson, then, which the text conveys to us is that the Israelites owned only as much of the land of promise as they actually trod with the sole of their foot. They had a large promise, but it was to be made good by their own exertions. It is God's law, true of your spiritual inheritance as of the ancient literal inheritance of Israel, that only as much as you measure out with the sole of your foot is truly your own. You have the Bible, and you think you know it well; and yet of this vast religious literature you only really know a mere fragment. You confine your reading to your favourite passages, while you leave the rest unstudied; and yet it is in these neglected parts that new truth is most often to be found. Then you have the privileges and blessings of grace! They are great and extensive, but they are conditioned by the same law that only what you live up to, appropriate, and realise of them is your own. God's superabounding grace is limited by the bounds you yourselves put upon it. If you are made straitly, God's blessing must needs straiten to you. Your salvation is just as much as, and no more than, you yourselves experience of it. Christ says to you in every case, "According to your faith be it unto you." Then there is your own individual Christian life. What a vast, unclaimed, untrodden land of promise it is! You have each a boundless capacity; "you are made to seek, to long for the infinite truth, the infinite good, the infinite love." How little have the greatest saints been able to fill up the grand outline which God sketched out at first when He made man in His own image! How far short have you all come of God's design for you, and even of your own ideal! You have contracted the bounds of your being and the bounds of your world to the smallest dimensions by your devotion to the petty and passing things of earth. And then there is the heavenly Canaan, the true land of promise, towards which you profess to be walking day by day as pilgrims and strangers on earth. God has given it to all His true Israel; but they shall only possess as much of it as they shall tread with the sole of their foot. You will only get as much of heaven as you are fit for; and in the case of many I fear that will be but a very small bit. (*Ibid.*) **All the land of the Hittites.**—*The land of the Hittites:*—One geographical expression, in the delimitation of the country, demands a brief explanation. While the country is defined as embracing the whole territory from Lebanon to the Euphrates, it is also defined as consisting in that direction of "all the land of the Hittites." But were not the Hittites one of the seven nations whose land was promised to Abraham and the fathers, and not even the first in the enumeration of these? Why should this great north-eastern section of the promised domain be designated "the land of the Hittites"? The time was when it was a charge against the accuracy of the Scripture record that it ascribed to the Hittites this extensive dominion. That time has passed away, inasmuch as, within quite recent years, the discovery has been made that in those distant times a great Hittite empire did exist in the very region specified, between Lebanon and the Euphrates. The discovery is based on twofold data: references in the Egyptian and other monuments to a powerful people, called the Khita

(Hittites), with whom even the great kings of Egypt had long and bloody wars; and inscriptions in the Hittite language found in Hamah, Aleppo, and other places in Syria. There is still much obscurity resting on the history of this people. That the Hittites proper prevailed so extensively has been doubted by some; a Hittite confederacy has been supposed, and sometimes a Hittite aristocracy exercising control over a great empire. The only point which it is necessary to dwell on here is, that in representing the tract between Lebanon and Euphrates as equivalent to "all the land of the Hittites," the author of the Book of Joshua made a statement which has been abundantly verified by recent research. (*W. G. Blaikie, D.D.*) There shall not any man be able to stand before thee.—*Joshua on the march*:—"There shall not any man be able," &c. "Well," you say, "it does not require any great courage to go out with a backing like that." I reply, God promised Joshua no more than He promises you and me in our conflicts. The framer of the universe, the chieftain of all eternity, has pledged all His resources to see us through, and He promised no more than that to Joshua. His first undertaking was to cross the river Jordan in a spring freshet. You might as well talk of wading across the Hudson river at Yonken as to think of wading the river Jordan at the season of which I am speaking. The Canaanites on the other side felt perfectly secure. But one day Joshua orders out his troops, and tells them to fall into line. "Forward: march!" They pass on towards the river, and it seems as if the light armed troops, and the spearmen, and the archers, and all their leaders, must be swept down in the fearful flood. Let them prepare, you say, for a watery grave. March on. Come to the other bank. They reach the bank, and they pull themselves up its steep, thirty or forty feet in height—they pull themselves up the bank by the oleanders, and the tamarisks, and the willows, until they reach the top. No sooner have they climbed up this high bank than with dash, and roar, and terrific rush, the waters of the Jordan break loose from their strange anchorage. God never makes any provision for the Christian's retreat. He clears the path to Canaan if we go ahead; if we go back, we die. Victory ahead! Darkness, flood, ruin, and death behind! You say: "Why didn't those Canaanites destroy Joshua and his troops while they had a chance? Here they were, on a bank thirty or forty feet high. There were the Israelites under Joshua down in the bed of the stream. Why didn't the Canaanites fight back these invaders?" The promise had been given, and the Lord God keeps His promise. "There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life." But we cannot stop here. It is no place for Joshua's troops to stay. What is that in the distance? At the end of a grove of palms eight miles long is the chief city Jericho, the great metropolis. Take it Joshua must. "Take it Joshua can't," say the unbelievers. Joshua rises up to his full stature, and he gives the command. He feels the right moment has come, and he says: "Shout! for the Lord hath given you the city," and the command is heard, and the people all together cry: "Down, Jericho! down, Jericho!" and that long line of solid masonry begins to quiver, and then crash go the walls, the temples, the palaces, until the earth quakes, and the heavens are blackened with the dust, and the shriek of the crushed city and the huzza of the victorious Israelites commingle. This is no place to stop. "Forward: march!" There is a city of Ai to be taken. "Oh!" says a scouting party just come back from that city, "you can take that very easily. Joshua, you need not go; you stay, and a few of us will go and take that city." They started out in pompous order to take the city of Ai. The men of Ai came out and gave one yell, and away ran the Israelites like reindeer. Our northern troops, at Bull Run, made slow time compared with those Israelites with the men of Ai after them. We have no right to go into the Lord's conflict having only half our force. Body, mind, soul, reputation, property—everything—must be marshalled, equipped, launched for God, and against our enemies. And soon the retreating army come up. They say: "Oh! general, we are all cut to pieces. Those men of Ai are awful people. We are all cut to pieces." Joshua falls down on his face in chagrin. But how did God arouse Joshua? Did He address him in some complimentary apostrophe? No. He says: "Get thee up. Why liest thou thus on thy face?" Joshua arose, I suppose, looking mortified; but his old courage came back again. He marshals all the Israelites, and he says: "We will go up *en masse*, and we will take the city of Ai." And as I see the smoke of the burning city curling in the sky, and as I hear the groans of the defeated men of Ai, and the victorious shout of the Israelites, Joshua hears something better than that: "There shall not any man

be able," &c. Joshua's troops cannot stop yet. "Forward: march!" says Joshua; for there is the city of Gibeon; it has put itself under the wing of Joshua's protection, and Joshua must defend it. Joshua makes a three days' march in one night. Prepare now to see the Gettysburgh, the Waterloo, the Sedan of the ancients. It is not yet quite sundown in Joshua's day, and we will have time for five royal funerals. Who will preach their funeral sermon? Massillon preached the funeral sermon of Louis XIX. Dr. Robert South preached a sermon commemorative of Charles I. Who will preach the funeral sermon of these five bad kings? Joshua. And what shall be his text? "There shall not any man be able," &c. "Oh," you say, "it is a pity to bury these five kings so ignominiously." No, sir; before that rock is sealed up I want to put in five more beings, first having them beheaded—King Alcohol, King Fraud, King Lust, King Superstition, King Bigotry. Have them all in. Cover them over with a mound of broken decanters and the *débris* of their miserable doings. Roll a rock against that cave so they never can get out. Then chisel for these last five kings the same epitaph you had for the other five kings; and let all the Christian reformers and philanthropists, before the sun of their protracted day of usefulness is ended, come up and read it. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *Victory assured* :—There is no foe to your growth in grace, no enemy in your Christian work, no dreaded form of evil dominating and cursing the souls of men, which was not included in your Saviour's conquests. You need not be afraid of them. When you touch them, they will flee before you. God has promised to deliver them up before you. There shall no man of them be able to stand before you. Neither Anakim nor fenced cities need daunt you. You are one of the conquering legion. Claim your share in the Saviour's victory. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) **I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.**—*A great promise* :—I. THE IMPORT OF THE PROMISE. 1. It includes in it more than that natural and essential presence of God which surrounds all beings and all things; for the essence of God is diffused through the trackless path of immensity. 2. It refers to God's special and gracious presence. (1) Friendship; (2) observation; (3) direction; (4) protection; (5) provision. 3. A more than ordinary communication of God's presence is vouchsafed to those who are called out to services of peculiar difficulty, to offices of high responsibility. II. THE CERTAINTY OF THE FULFILMENT OF THIS PROMISE. I feel assured of its fulfilment when I reflect—1. On the Author of this promise. "I will be with thee. I will not leave thee," &c. "God is not a man that He should lie, neither the Son of man that He should repent." 2. The terms in which the promise is couched. Repetition, but no tautology. 3. Experience. Was not God with Moses? III. THE ADVANTAGES WHICH THE FULFILMENT OF THIS PROMISE WILL THROW OVER YOUR WHOLE LIFE. Oh, let but this be fulfilled, and you are safe for both worlds, for time and for eternity! Mark its influence—1. On the hours of solitude. Every real Christian will wish to be alone: he will say, "I am never less alone than when alone." 2. On your intercourse with society. Others will take knowledge of you, that you have been with Jesus. 3. On your conduct. Prudence; benevolence; sanctity. 4. On afflictions and distresses. If God be with us, no weapon shall prosper against us, no trap shall catch us, no pit shall ensnare us. 5. On the days of life's decline, and in the immediate prospect of its conclusion. All earthly attachments are doomed to be dissolved; but God is ever with His servants, especially when most needed. Lessons: 1. Admire the astonishing condescension and grace of God, that He should thus address Himself to worms of the earth, to sinful worms, to such as you and I are! 2. Let me ask you if you have an interest in this promise. 3. Be very thankful for any measure of the fulfilment of this promise which you may have enjoyed. (*G. Clayton, M.A.*) *God with us through life* :—I. THE INTEREST WHICH GOD TAKES IN MEN'S LIVES. 1. Every event is closely observed by Him. 2. He often comes unsolicited and unthought of. Like the mother who, while attending to the duties of her household, still keeps her eye on the little one at play, that she may interpose in time of danger. II. GOD APPEALS TO HIS PAST CONDUCT TO ENCOURAGE HIS SERVANT TO TRUST IN HIM. 1. We are influenced more by the past conduct of a friend than by his promises. 2. There are degrees of manifested interest, care, and love. God was with Moses—(1) Continuously, from beginning to end. (2) Notwithstanding a variation of conduct on the part of His servant. (3) Under circumstances of great provocation. (4) As a Friend of infinite resources. (5) As an unerring Guide. (6) To uphold his position against any usurpation on the part of others. III. THE BESTOWAL OF THE BLESSINGS INCLUDED IN THIS DECLARATION WAS MADE DEPENDENT UPON JOSHUA'S OBEDIENCE. He

who will not keep God's law cannot have the presence of God with him. (*A London Clergyman.*) *A great promise* :—I. IT IS A GREAT PROMISE. For it includes everything. God's presence can supply wisdom, can give strength, and will insure success. II. IT WAS TO A GREAT MAN. 1. He was humble. 2. He was trained—had followed the Jews from Egypt. 3. He was good. Not one notorious sin or evil habit is recorded of him as there is of nearly every other noted character in Scripture. He was the only one who withstood the test of the wilderness journey. III. IT WAS IN REFERENCE TO A GREAT WORK. 1. The conquering the promised land. 2. The organising the people. 3. The vindicating the power and glory of God. (*Homilist.*) *Strengthening medicine for God's servants* :—I. THE SUITABILITY OF THE CONSOLATION WHICH THESE WORDS GAVE TO JOSHUA. "I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." 1. This must have been very cheering to him in reference to himself. Joshua may possibly have been somewhat despondent under a very pressing sense of his own deficiencies; and this cheering assurance would meet his case. If God be with our weakness it waxes strong; if He be with our folly it rises into wisdom; if He be with our timidity it gathers courage. 2. The consolation given to Joshua would be exceedingly suitable in the presence of his enemies. Surely, in the presence of God, Anakim become dwarfs, strongholds become as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, and chariots of iron are as thistledown upon the hillside driven before the blast. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" They that be with us are more than they that be against us, when once the Lord of hosts is seen in our ranks. 3. This consolation, too, was sufficient for all supplies. Perhaps Joshua knew that the manna was no longer to fall. "I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" was a supply which would meet all the demands of the commissariat. When the Lord opens all His granaries none shall lack for bread, and when He unlocks His wardrobes none shall go bare. 4. Surely this word must often have brought consolation to the heart of Joshua when he saw the people failing him. Oh, what a blessed thing it is in a false and fickle world, where he that eats bread with us lifts up his heel against us, where the favourite counsellor becomes an Ahithophel, and turns his wisdom into crafty hate, to know that "there is a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother," one who is faithful and gives us sure tokens of a love which many waters cannot quench! II. AT WHAT TIMES MAY WE CONSIDER THIS PROMISE TO BE SPOKEN TO OURSELVES? 1. Surely it is when we are called to do God's work. Joshua's work was the Lord's work. Do you know that God has put you where you are, and called you to do the work to which your life is dedicated? Then go on in God's name, for, as surely as He called you to His work, you may be sure that to you also He says, as indeed to all His servants, "I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." 2. But I hear some of you say, "We are not engaged in work of such a kind that we could precisely call it 'work for God.'" Well, but are you engaged in a work which you endeavour to perform to God's glory? Is your ordinary trade one which is lawful—one concerning which you have no doubt as to its honest propriety; and in carrying it on do you follow right principles only? 3. We must, if we are to have this promise, take God into our calculations. A great many persons go about their supposed lifework without thinking about God. You must walk by faith if you are to enjoy the privileges of the faithful. 4. We must also be careful that we walk in God's ways. Observe that the next verse to the text runs thus, "Be strong and of a good courage," and then the seventh verse is a singular one, "Only be thou strong," &c. What for? To obey! Does it want courage and strength to obey? Why, nowadays, that man is thought to be courageous who will have no laws of God to bind him; and he is thought to be strong-minded who ridicules revelation. But let us rest assured that he is truly strong of mind and heart who is content to be thought a fool, and sticks to the good old truth, and keeps the good old way. III. WHAT THIS PROMISE DOES NOT PRECLUDE. 1. This promise does not exclude effort. If you want to succeed, use every faculty you have, and put forth all your strength; and if it is a right cause you may then fall back on this promise. 2. Neither does this promise preclude occasional disaster. Yes, and without the violation of any law, the best man in the world must expect in the most successful enterprise that there will be some discouragements. Look at the sea: it is rolling in, it will rise to full tide before long, but every wave that comes up dies upon the shore; and after two or three great waves which seem to capture the shingle there comes a feebler one which sucks back. Very well, but the sea will win, and reach its fulness. So in every good work for God there is a back-drawing wave every now and then. God will certainly test you, but He will not fail you, nor forsake you. 3. Nor, again, does

this promise preclude frequent tribulations and testings of faith. In the autobiography of the famous Francké of Halle, who built, and, in the hand of God, provided for, the orphan-house of Halle, he says, "I thought when I committed myself and my work to God by faith, that I had only to pray when I had need, and that the supplies would come; but I found that I had sometimes to wait and pray for a long time." The supplies did come, but not at once. The pinch never went so far as absolute want; but there were intervals of severe pressure. There was nothing to spare. Every spoonful of meal had to be scraped from the bottom of the barrel, and every drop of oil that oozed out seemed as if it must be the last; but still it never did come to the last drop, and there was always just a little meal left. God has not promised to take any of you to heaven without trying your faith. 4. This promise does not preclude our suffering very greatly, and our dying, and perhaps dying a very sad and terrible death, as men judge. God never left Paul, but I have seen the spot where Paul's head was smitten off by the headsman. The Lord never left Peter, but Peter, like his Master, had to die by crucifixion. The Lord never left the martyrs, but they had to ride to heaven in chariots of fire. IV. WHAT, THEN, DOES THE TEXT MEAN, IF WE MAY HAVE ALL THIS TRIAL HAPPENING TO US? 1. Your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord. Press on. We have heard of a minister who added only one to his Church through a long year of very earnest ministry—only one, a sad thing for him; but that one happened to be Robert Moffatt, and he was worth a thousand of most of us. Go on. If you bring but one to Christ, who shall estimate the value of the one? 2. And then there shall be no desertion as to yourself, for your heavenly Friend has said, "I will not forsake thee." You will not be left alone or without a helper. You are thinking of what you will do in old age. Do not think of that: think of what God will do for you in old age. Oh, but your great need and long illness will wear out your friends, you say. Perhaps you may wear out your friends, but you will not wear out your God, and He can raise up new helpers if the old ones fail. Oh, but your infirmities are many, and will soon crush you down: you cannot live long in such circumstances. Very well, then you will be in heaven; and that is far better. But you dread pining sickness. It may never come; and suppose it should come, remember what will come with it—"I will make all thy bed in thy sickness." "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee"—so runs the promise. "Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God." V. WHY MAY WE BE QUITE SURE THAT THIS PROMISE WILL BE FULFILLED TO US? 1. I answer, first, we may be quite sure because it is God's promise. Did ever any promise of God fall to the ground yet? 2. Rest ye well assured that if a man be called to do God's work God will not fail him, because it is not after the manner of the Lord to desert His servants. He will not push His servants into severe conflicts and then fail them. 3. Besides, remember that should God's servants fail, if they are really God's servants, the enemy would exult and boast against the Lord Himself. This was a great point with Joshua in after-days (chap. vii. 9). If the Lord raises up Luther, and does not help Luther, then it is not Luther that fails; it is God that fails, in the estimation of the world. 4. Besides, if God has raised you up to accomplish a purpose by you, do you think He will be defeated? Were ever any of His designs frustrated? 5. Besides, if we trust God, and live for God, He loves us much too well to leave us. It is not to be imagined that He will ever put a load upon His own children's shoulders without giving them strength to bear the burden, or send them to labours for which He will not give them adequate resources. Oh, rest in the Lord, ye faithful. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) Be strong and of a good courage.—*A great promise and a stirring exhortation:*—What the heathen gods are fabled to have done with some of their favourite warriors, God here and now does to this His first soldier-saint, sending him forth to the fray invulnerable, invincible. By faith in this great promise, Joshua is more than conqueror. Poor and tame in comparison is the "*Veni, vidi, vici!*" of Rome's great hero. God's presence is pledged to Joshua unconditionally and unalterably. Oh, highly favoured Joshua! Yes, and also highly favoured saints, for even with a like great and precious promise do we go a warfare against evil. In regard to both the outer and the inner conflict in which we are engaged we should always remember that we are on the winning side. The battle is the Lord's. "Forward" is the Divine command. We are not to make up our minds for defeat, but to march in the assurance of victory. "My grace is sufficient for thee." This promise gives us power as we face error of every kind. The enemies of the gospel in these days are proud and boastful. If we were to judge by their shouts, we should think that the whole fabric of Christianity was

falling to pieces. Have we anything to pit against these enemies? Most assuredly. The Divine presence, as in the case of Joshua, is pledged to be with us. This great promise given to Joshua was followed up by a stirring exhortation. Courage! this peal of bells rings out in all its changes. Why? Because Joshua was a coward? Nay, he had the heart of a lion, but because courage is the fundamental virtue in every saint of God, in every soldier of righteousness, in every witness for the truth. One of the great wants of the day is courage, courage to confess Christ in every company and on all occasions; courage to hold fast to His every word; courage to do all His will; courage to follow wherever He leads. It is called a good courage, and no virtue better deserves the epithet, for it is good whether we consider its qualities or its achievements, the throne on which it sits or the crown with which it is adorned. It is good courage because it is obedient, not self-willed, obstinate, headstrong. Again and again the greatest exploits of courage have been summed up in the words, "I must obey God." Such courage is of the highest quality. It can never quail, because conscious of eternal rectitude. It is a good courage also because it is studious and humble. Its aim being to obey all God's will, in the spirit as well as in the letter, it gives all diligence to know God's will. Accordingly, the hero of Jehovah meditates in God's law day and night; takes counsel not with flesh and blood, but with the living oracles, and finds therein all his comfort, strength, and light. This good courage, being obedient and studious, is also intelligent. It observes with watchful care the hints of Providence and the checks of conscience. It learns better every day what God's will is in all things. Remember that such courage is the great secret of success. This above all things frightens our great adversary the devil. Satan has no dread of learning, or wisdom, or riches, but he does fear the courage of a soul resting in communion with God. And well he may, for this courage arms the soul with Divine might. (*A. B. Mackay.*)

The sources of Joshua's strength:—I. A FAITHFUL PAST. The aloe blooms but once in a hundred years, but every hour of all that century is needed to produce the delicate texture and resplendent beauty of the flower. The deed of a Grace Darling is not the sudden outburst of the moment that gives it birth, but the result of long years of self-discipline, courage, and ministry to others. And this summons of Joshua to the leader's place in Israel was the guerdon of more than eighty years of faithful service. None of us can tell for what God is educating us. We fret and murmur at the narrow round and daily task of ordinary life, not realising that it is only thus that we can be prepared for the high and holy office which awaits us. We must descend before we can ascend. God's will comes to thee and me in daily circumstances, in little things equally as in great; meet them bravely; be at your best always, though the occasion be one of the very least; dignify the smallest summons by the greatness of your response; so the call will come to you as to Joshua, the son of Nun, Moses' minister. II. A DISTINCT CALL. The supreme inquiry for each of us, when summoned to a new work, is not whether we possess sufficient strength or qualification for it, but if we have been called to it of God; and when that is so there is no further cause for anxiety. If it is in His plan that we should march through a river, or attack a walled town, or turn to flight an army, we have simply to go forward. Rivers will dry up, walls will fall down, armies shall be scattered as snow in summer. There is no such thing as impossibility when God says, "Forward, soul, arise, go over this Jordan!" III. THE SENSE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD. There have been generals whose presence on the field of battle has been the presage and guarantee of victory. Not only have they inspired the soldiers with a sense of confidence in their leadership, but they have encouraged them by their personal prowess and bravery. There is a marvellous sense of security and courage when a Christiana, a Mr. Fearing, or a Miss Much-Afraid is assured of the presence of a Greatheart, who has never turned his back on a foe. And a lonely, trembling soul dares to step bravely across the margin of life into the unknown beyond: to go down unabashed into the chill waters of death, because it can sing, "Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." IV. THE INDWELLING OF THE WORD OF GOD. Coal contains within its texture the strength absorbed from the sun in bygone ages; so words will pass on to men the heroic thoughts which thrilled the souls of those who spake them first. There are words, as there are strains of music, which cannot be uttered without nerving men to dare and do, to attempt and achieve. A woman will be strong to wait and suffer for long years in the strength of a sentence spoken by her lover as he parted from her. An army has before now forgot sleepless nights and hungry marches in the stirring harangue of its general. And is not this what

the prophet meant, when he said, "Thy words were found and I did eat them, and Thy words were unto me a joy, and the rejoicing of my heart"? and what Jesus meant when He said, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life"? We can do all things when Christ is in us in unthwarted power. The only limit lies in our faith and capacity, or, in other words, in our absolute submission to His indwelling. Little children can overcome when there is within them a Stronger than their foes. Weaklings may do exploits when the Mighty Conqueror who travels in the greatness of His strength makes them the vehicle of His progress. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *The strength and courage needed for common life:*—"Be thou strong and very courageous." What to do? To lead the army? To batter down strong walls and enter into the imminent, deadly breach? Nay, all this is left out of sight; the exhortation to be "strong and very courageous" is given solely with a moral application. A man shows himself more brave in an inflexible adherence to the law of God as the the rule of his life in all things than in any feats of arms or deeds of daring. I. A SUFFICIENT RULE OF GUIDANCE FOR LIFE. Joshua had; we have. Our law is the whole gospel, as requiring from us a practical and loving and continuous obedience. To be "strong" is to make endeavour to go forward and grasp something in the Divine life; it is to take up a certain position in practical obedience, and say (not ostentatiously yet clearly), "I am here, I stand by this." To be "of good courage" is to maintain that position against the force of temptation and opposition of every kind; is to say firmly, "Here I shall abide, I cannot go back from this." Well, but a life that consists of gaining new positions, and grasping new things, and defending all that is thus attained, is of necessity a life of enterprise and progress. And such a life, in this world, will certainly meet with a great deal of opposition, silent and declared, and will require a great deal of strength and courage in those who seek to lead it. 1. Indeed, we might truly say that strength and courage are needed at home, and with ourselves, before we meet the world at all. The critical point of the struggle is within. Let me be strong, then, against my inferior self! Let me grip him hard, and wrestle with him, until he is overthrown! Let me be very courageous against his withering and insidious suggestions. 2. Then also, strength and courage are needed constantly and much in the Church, *i.e.*, among Christian people. One Christian needs to be strong against other Christians—in this way as well as in others—that every Christian has his own inner thought of what he ought to be and do; his own ideal, as we call it. 3. Then still more is courage needed, and strength, when you go more fully out into the world. Here are certain principles in the law of Christ, as the regulative system of a Christian's life, principles of honour and honesty, of purity, sobriety, love, and self-denial, of humility and gentleness, which are clearly different from the principles that obtain in the world generally. Not that contrary principles are professed openly in the world except by a few; but that contrary, or at any rate far inferior, principles are acted upon, through the world, in its different spheres, commercial, political, literary, social, is just as certain as it is that there is a world at all. One great point of duty with Christians just now, I think, ought to be the endeavour to live simple lives, so as, if possible, to pull back this drifting society of ours towards the simplicity it has lost. 4. Again, it is sometimes necessary to speak frankly and boldly in condemnation of the action or in opposition to the speaking of others. II. HOW WE MAY ATTAIN THIS TEMPER AND HABIT OF CHRISTIAN COURAGE. It is fed by truth, by the law, or the revealed truth of God. What men call "spirit," the mere dash and effervescence of nature, will soon evaporate; but when the soul has found the flowing fountains of strength, and drinks of the same day by day, her courage will be day by day renewed. Again, not only must we take the Word of God into our daily thought and meditation, but believing the wonderful assurance it gives us of the actual presence of the speaker, the Lord, with those who serve Him, we must make room for Him in our daily life, and lean upon the almighty arm, and even in the darkest and most unsuccessful moments sit silent to hear the great reviving words, "The Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *The charge to the soldier of the Lord:*—I. THE DUTY OF COURAGEOUS STRENGTH. Christianity has altered the perspective of human virtues, has thrown the gentler ones into prominence altogether unknown before, and has dimmed the brilliancy of the old heroic type of character; but it has not struck those virtues out of its list. Still, there is as much need in the lowliest Christian life for the loftiest heroism as ever there was. All Christian progress is conflict, and we have to fight, not only with the evils that are within, but if we would be true to the

obligations of our profession and loyal to the commands of our Master, we have to take our part in the great campaign which He has inaugurated and is ever carrying on against every abuse and oppression, iniquity and sin, that grinds down the world and makes our brethren miserable and servile. Be strong! Then strength is a duty; then weakness is a sin. Then the amount of strength that we possess and wield is regulated by ourselves. We have our hands on the sluice. We may open it to let the whole full tide run in, or we may close it till a mere dribble reaches us. For the strength which is strength, and not merely weakness in a fever, is a strength derived. "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." Let Christ's strength in. Open the heart wide that it may come. Keep yourself in continual touch with God, the fountain of all power. Trust is strength, because trust touches the Rock of Ages. But courage is duty, too, as well as strength. Power and the consciousness of power do not always go together. In regard of the strength of nature, courage and might are quite separable. There may be a strong coward and a weak hero. But in the spiritual region, strength and courage do go together. The consciousness of the Divine power with us, and that alone, will make us bold with a boldness that has no taint of levity and presumption mingled with it, and never will overestimate its own strength. II. THE DUTY OF IMPLICIT OBEDIENCE TO THE WORD OF COMMAND. Courage and strength come first, and on them follows the command to do all according to the law, to keep it without deflection to right or left, and to meditate on it day and night. These two virtues make the perfect soldier—courage and obedience. But the connection between these two is not merely that they must co-exist, but that courage and strength are needed for, and are to find their noblest field of exercise in, absolute acceptance of, and unhesitating, swift, complete, unmurmuring obedience to, everything that is discerned to be God's will and our duty. For the Christian soldier, then, God's law is his marching orders. The written Word, and especially the Incarnate Word, are our law of conduct. Christ has given us Himself, and therein has given a sufficient directory for conduct and conflict which fits close to all our needs, and will prove definite and practical enough if we honestly try to apply it. The application of Christ's law to daily life takes some courage, and is the proper field for the exercise of Christian strength. If you are not a bold Christian you will very soon get frightened out of obedience to your Master's commandments. Courage, springing from the realisation of God's helping strength, is indispensable to make any man, in any age, live out, thoroughly and consistently, the principles of the the law of Jesus Christ. No man in this generation will work out a punctual obedience to what he knows to be the will of God, without finding out that all the Canaanites are not dead yet, but that there are enough of them left to make a very thorny life for the consistent follower of Jesus Christ. And not only is there courage needed for the application of the principles of conduct which God has given us, but you will never have them handy for swift application unless, in many a quiet hour of silent, solitary, patient meditation, you have become familiar with them. III. THE SURE VICTORY OF SUCH BOLD OBEDIENCE: "thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest"; "thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then shalt thou have good success," or, as the last word might be rendered, "then shalt thou 'act wisely.'" You may not get victory from an earthly point of view, for many a man that lives strong and courageous and joyfully obeying God's law as far as he knows it, and because he loves the Lawgiver, goes through life, and finds that, as far as the world's estimate is concerned, there is nothing but failure as his portion. The success which my text means is the carrying out of conscientious convictions of God's will into practice. That is the only success that is worth talking about or looking for. The man that succeeds in obeying and translating God's will into conduct is the victor, whatever be the outward fruits of his life. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Strength and courage*:—Joshua must be strong and very courageous. But are strength and courage really within our own power? Is strength not absolutely a Divine gift, and as dependent on God in its ordinary degrees as it was in the case of Samson in its highest degree? No doubt in a sense it is so; and yet the amount even of our bodily strength is not wholly beyond our own control. As bodily strength is undoubtedly weakened by careless living, by excess of eating and drinking, by all irregular habits, by the breathing of foul air, by indolence and self-indulgence of every kind, so undoubtedly it is increased and promoted by attention to the simple laws of health, by activity and exercise, by sleep and sabbatic rest, by the moderate use of wholesome food, as well as by abstinence from hurtful drinks and drugs. And surely the duty of being

strong, in so far as such things can give strength, is of far more importance than many think; for if we can thus maintain and increase our strength we shall be able to serve both God and man much better and longer than we could otherwise have done. But in Joshua's case it was no doubt strength and courage of soul that was mainly meant. Even that is not wholly independent of the ordinary conditions of the body. On the other hand, there are no doubt memorable cases where the elasticity and power of the spirit have been in the very inverse ratio to the strength of the body. By cheerful views of life and duty, natural depression has been counteracted, and the soul filled with hope and joy. "The joy of the Lord," said Nehemiah, "is the strength of His people." Fellowship with God, as our reconciled God and Father in Christ, is a source of perpetual strength. Who does not know the strengthening and animating influence of the presence even of a friend, when we find his fresh and joyous temperament playing on us in some season of depression? The radiance of his face, the cheeriness of his voice, the elasticity of his movements seem to infuse new hope and courage into the jaded soul. When he is gone we try to shake off the despondent feeling that has seized us, and gird ourselves anew for the battle of life. And if such an effect can be produced by fellowship with a fellow-creature, how much more by fellowship with the infinite God!—especially when it is His work we are trying to do, and when we have all His promises of help to rest on. "God is near thee, therefore cheer thee," is a perpetual solace and stimulus to the Christian soul. (*W. G. Blaikie, D.D.*) *Christian fortitude*:—1. Fortitude in bearing. 2. Fortitude in attempting or assailing. (*D. Featley, D.D.*) *God's strength made perfect in human weakness*:—What! must all they whom God uses be strong? Is it essential that there should be strength of limb and muscle in the physical and moral constitution of those who are called to do the Divine biddings in the world? Because, if that be so, we who are like Ehud, left-handed, like Gideon, least in our father's house, or like Saul of Tarsus, painfully conscious of weakness, can never get beyond the rank and file in the army of the Lord. And yet, may not this reiterated appeal indicate that the heart of Joshua misgave him, and that he was conscious of his utter inadequacy to fulfil the great commission that was thrust upon him? Probably he had never dreamt of so high an honour, so vast a responsibility. When, therefore, the call came to him to assume the office which Moses was vacating, his heart failed him, and he needed every kind of encouragement and stimulus, both from God and man. "Be strong" means that he felt weak; "Be of good courage" means that he was affrighted; "Be not thou dismayed" means that he seriously considered whether he would not have to give up the task. He was a worm and no man; how should he deliver Israel? It is when men are in this condition that God approaches them with the summons to undertake vast and overwhelming responsibilities. Most of us are too strong for Him to use us, too full of our own schemes and plans and ways of doing things. He must empty us, and humble us, and bring us down to the dust of death, so low that we need every straw of encouragement, every leaf of help; and then He will raise us up, and make us as the rod of His strength. The world talks of the survival of the fittest. But God gives power to the faint, and increases might to them that have no strength; He perfects His strength in weakness, and uses things that are not to bring to nought things that are. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Courage necessary*:—It is said of Cromwell that when he had gathered some raw troops, being much in doubt about their courage, he determined to put it to the test before employing them in active service. He therefore placed a number of soldiers in ambush, in a wood through which he had occasion to lead his new regiment, and when these rushed out suddenly upon the new levies all the timid among them turned and fled. These Cromwell sent to their homes as unfit for his service, and so commenced the training of the men who became known to history as his "Ironsides." *A dauntless spirit*:—Pleopidas hearing that his enemy was coming to give him battle with double the number that he possessed himself, replied to his informant, "So much the better for us: we shall beat so many the more." So should the Christian view the trials and sorrows of this life, be they never so many. Through Christ they may all be overcome. (*Handbook of Illustration.*) **Unto this people shalt thou divide . . . the land.**—*The right people for the land*:—First of all, the land had to be conquered; and there is no difficulty in seeing how necessary it was for one who had this task on hand to be strong and of a good courage, and to meditate on God's law. Then the land had to be divided, and the people settled in their new life, and Joshua had to initiate them, as it were, in that life; he had to bind on their consciences the conditions on which

the land was to be enjoyed, and start them in the performance of the duties, moral, social, and religious, which the Divine constitution required. Here lay the most difficult part of his task. They had not only to be planted physically in groups over the country, but they had to be married to it morally, otherwise they had no security of tenure, but were liable to summary eviction. It was no land of rest for idolaters; all depended on the character they attained: loyalty to God was the one condition of a happy settlement. Thus we see the connection between Joshua's devotion to the book of the law and success in the great work of his life—"then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success." No doubt he would have the appearance of success if he simply cleared out the inhabitants who were so degraded by sin that God was compelled to sweep them off, and settled His people in their room. But that, after all, was but a small matter unless accompanied by something more. It would not secure the people from at last sharing the fate of the old inhabitants; so far at least that though they should not be exterminated, yet they would be scattered over the face of the globe. And so at all times, in dealing with human beings, we can obtain no adequate and satisfying success unless their hearts are turned to God. Your children may be great scholars, or successful merchants, or distinguished authors, or brilliant artists, or even statesmen; what does it come to if they are dead to God, and have no living fellowship with Jesus Christ? (*W. G. Blaikie, D.D.*) **Turn not . . . to the right hand or to the left.**—*Joshua's obedience*:—I. OBEDIENCE IS THE HIGHEST PRACTICAL COURAGE. The world counts obedience to be a mean-spirited thing, and speaks of rebellion as freedom. We have heard men say, "I will be my own master; I shall follow my own will." To be a free thinker and a free liver seems to be the worldling's glory. Take the world's own martial rule. Who is accounted to be the boldest and the best soldier but the man who is most thoroughly obedient to the captain's command? There is a story told of the old French wars which has been repeated hundreds of times. A sentinel is set to keep a certain position, and at nightfall, as he is pacing to and fro, the emperor himself comes by. He does not know the password. Straightway the soldier stops him. "You cannot pass," says he. "But I must pass," says the emperor. "No," replies the man, "if you were the little corporal in grey himself you should not go by," by which, of course, he meant the emperor. Thus the autocrat himself was held in check by order. The vigilant soldier was afterwards handsomely rewarded, and all the world said that he was a brave fellow. Then surely it is not a mean and sneaking thing for a man to be obedient to Him who is the Commander-in-chief of the universe, the King of kings, and Lord of lords. II. THE EXACTNESS OF OBEDIENCE IS THE ESSENCE OF OBEDIENCE. The world saith, "We must not be too precise." As one said to an old Puritan once, "Many people have rent their consciences in halves; could not you just make a little nick in yours?" "No," he said, "I cannot, for my conscience belongs to God." "We must live, you know," said a money-loving shopkeeper, as his excuse for doing what he could not otherwise defend. "Yes, but we must die," was the reply, "and therefore we must do no such thing." We are probably better dead if we cannot live without doing wrong. The very essence of obedience lies in exactness. Probably your child, if sometimes disobedient, would still, as a general rule, do what you told him. It would be in the little things that thoroughgoing and commendable obedience would appear. Let the world judge of this for itself. Here is an honest man. Do people say of him, "He is such an honest man that he would not steal a horse"? No, that would not prove him to be very honest; but they say, "He would not even take a pin that did not belong to him." That is the world's own description of honesty, and surely when it comes to obedience to God it ought to be the same. If I profess to obey the Lord Jesus Christ, the crucial test will not be in great actions, but in little ones. III. THE PATH OF OBEDIENCE IS GENERALLY A MIDDLE PATH. There is sure to be a right hand, there is sure to be a left hand, and both are probably wrong. There will be extremes on either side. I believe that this is true in ten thousand things in ordinary life, and also true in spiritual things in very many respects. With regard, for instance, to our words; the course of speech generally is, on the one hand to say too much, or on the other hand to say too little; to be silent when the wicked are before us, or else to be rash with our lips and betray a good cause through our rashness in defending it. There is a time to speak, and there is a time to be silent, and he that judgeth well will mark his opportunities and take the middle course. He will neither be garrulous with advice that is not required, nor will he be cowardly and dumb when he ought to bear testimony for his Master.

The same holds good with regard to zeal. We have some abroad nowadays whose heads are very hot. They talk as if they would turn the world upside down, whilst it is their own brains that need first to be turned into a right condition. Theirs is a fire which burns down the house instead of burning in the grate and warming the household. But shall we therefore not be zealous? God forbid! There is a middle course of true, sensible, prudent zeal—adhering to the truth, and never believing that people can be converted by lies, however earnestly bawled into their ears; walking within the bounds of God's truth, and being persuaded that the best seed to sow is that which God puts into the basket of His Word, and that sinners are not to be saved by rash statements nor by extravagant declamation, but that they are brought to Christ, as they were of old, by the simple telling out of the story of the Cross affectionately, and by the power of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Here, again, "turn neither to the right hand nor to the left." IV. THE PATH OF RIGHT IS THE PATH OF TRUE PROSPERITY. God does not invariably make the doing of the right to be the means of pecuniary gain to us. On the contrary, it frequently happens that for a time men are great losers by their obedience to Christ. But the Scripture always speaks as to the long run; it sums up the whole of life—there it promises true riches. If thou wouldst prosper, keep close to the Word of God, and to thy conscience, and thou shalt have the best prosperity. The thief, though he takes a short way to get rich, yet takes such a dangerous way that it does not pay; but he who walks straight along the narrow road shall find it to be the shortest way to the best kind of prosperity, both in this world and in that which is to come. If not, if we get no outward prosperity here, I trust you and I, if we love Christ, and are filled with His Spirit, can do without it. Well, if we must be poor, it will soon be over, and in heaven there shall be no poverty. Let us, then, run all risks for Christ. He is no soldier who cannot die for his country; he is no Christian who cannot lose life itself for Christ. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Obedience the condition of victory:*—Yes, the Lord will be with us in our holy war, but He demands of us that we strictly follow His rules. 1. Our victories will very much depend upon our obeying Him with all our heart, throwing strength and courage into the actions of our faith. If we are half-hearted, we cannot expect more than half a blessing. 2. We must obey the Lord with care and thoughtfulness. 3. We must obey with universal readiness. We may not pick and choose, but must take all the Lord's commands as they come. 4. In all this we must go on with exactness and constancy. Ours is to be a straightforward course, which bends neither to the right nor to the left. (*Ibid.*) **This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein.**—*A good working Bible:*—Rare botanical specimens are found by diligent searching. It is by earnest and prayerful study of the Bible that we discover truths that we may call our own. We have a brother who has been working in the gold mines of California for many years. He has a watch-chain that he greatly values because the gold in it is what he searched and dug out of the mountain himself by hard labour and much sacrifice. Truths discovered as the result of hard study are very precious to us. The Bible should be an every-day book to us. A very handsome and expensive Bible on the parlour stand, covered with a bric-à-brac, is of little value as compared with a good working Bible. A well-known Sunday-school worker tells of going into a house in North Wales. As he sat by a table talking with a little girl, he picked up a Bible, when she instantly said, "That's my mother's every-day Bible, sir; I'll give you the Sunday Bible if you want to read." We all need an every-day Bible, one that can be handled easily and conveniently—a Bible with every precious promise and every verse that has been especially helpful to us marked. The Jews were commanded to read the Scripture all the time, to write it upon the door-posts; to have it as frontlets between their eyes; to talk of it by the way, and teach it to their children and children's children. (*Home Messenger.*) *God's revealed will the only safe rule for all individual guidance, and the only legitimate foundation for all national law:*—I. IT IS OF THE UTMOST IMPORTANCE THAT EVERY MAN SHOULD HAVE A SURE GUIDE FOR THE DIRECTION OF HIS STEPS. 1. If you consider the character and condition of man, the truth before us must claim universal acknowledgment. Man is the creature of God. His being, powers, and blessings are all derived from his Maker. He is therefore bound to please Him in all his ways and works. But how is this to be done? By what measure, so to speak, or after what manner, is this love to be expressed, and this obedience to be rendered? 2. If you consider man not only as the mere creature of God, but as a creature endued with an immortal soul, the truth before us will be still more apparent. 3. If you consider man as a sinner

before God, exposed to all the dreadful consequences of his rebellion, and utterly without ability to help himself, the truth of this position must still more strikingly appear. 4. If you consider man as exposed to all the vicissitudes of this life—as subject to sorrow, suffering, and pain, as liable to sickness, affliction, and all the other evils incident to our present existence—the truth of this position must claim the approbation of all. 5. If you consider man in reference to death, judgment, and eternity, no voice can ever be lifted up in opposition to this truth. II. WHERE IS THIS SURE GUIDE TO BE MET WITH? 1. Is man capable of furnishing himself with such a rule? Evidently not; and that not merely as the negative applies to him as he now is, but even supposing him to be what he once was. 2. Consider the greatness and importance of the matters at stake, and it must be confessed that it would not be safe to trust in any provision coming from such a human source, even supposing it possible that it could be provided. 3. A provision of this kind, coming from any human source, would fall below the circumstances and condition in which we are placed, and therefore could never meet the exigencies of our case, nor, consequently, answer the end proposed. 4. The law, or revealed will of God, is the only safe rule for all individual guidance, as well as the only legitimate foundation for all national law. No man's ways or works can be acceptable in the sight of God who throws aside that rule and walks by the light of his own fire. III. THE BENEFIT AND ADVANTAGES OF FOLLOWING THAT RULE AND ABIDING THEREBY. 1. We shall have a sure guide for the direction of our steps. 2. We shall find everything plain before us. 3. We shall avoid the grievous mistakes and blunders into which others have fallen. 4. We shall find abundant provision for every emergency. 5. We shall be safe and prosperous here, and happy and blessed hereafter. Conclusion: 1. What an invaluable deposit are the sacred Scriptures as committed to any nation or people! 2. How widely have we departed from these sacred rules! 3. How needful it is that we should make these Holy Scriptures our constant study and daily counsellors! (*R. Shittler.*) *The Christian's law:*—"This book of the law," saith God to Joshua. And both in our text and in the verse preceding it is set forth as a rule claiming his observance and obedience, from which he may not swerve. In a peculiar sense we apply this term to the five books of Moses, and in a yet more limited one to the Decalogue. And since the New Testament contains so fully and so peculiarly the revelation of the gospel of the grace of God, and thus abounds with the language of invitation, promise, and privilege, it may seem as though to us the oracles of God had no other voice, and that the Bible is not to us the "book of the law" of God. But while we are jealous of God's grace, let us beware of a dangerous error. The Bible does propound to us a law—the very law of the two tables is unrepealed. Not the Jewish law as our code of worship or practice, not any law as the means of our justification, but the laws of Christian holiness and virtue. Our Bibles must be our lamps, our lights, our counsellors—our oracles of duty no less than of comfort. And while the Cross furnishes the motive, while the Spirit is the Teacher, the Author and Giver alike of will and power, the precepts and prohibitions of the Bible must be our guide, as the by-paths of sin and ruin present themselves on the right hand and on the left. We are not to go to this book of God for our creed or system of theology alone, but for our code of morals and practice. For the Bible is neither all doctrine, nor all promise; it has its rules, its precepts, its prohibitions. Its precepts based upon its doctrine, yoked graciously with its promises, but precepts still. You are placed from day to day amid duties and temptations. Your God, your fellow-men have many claims upon you; you stand in many and varied relationships. You are a pilgrim in a road bestrewed with pitfalls and beset with by-paths of sin and error; a soldier amid many and subtle and mighty foes, with a hard field to fight; a voyager over a stormy sea, amid shoals and rocks and quicksands. Your Bible is your guide, O pilgrim—your sword, O soldier—your chart, O seaman! What else shall preserve you even in sound doctrine in these dangerous days but that ye be "mighty in the Scriptures," and so reject another gospel, though its preachers wore the garb and semblance of angels, yea, though (were it possible) they were angels of light? Or what, in reference to your practice, shall secure you against the workings of sin's deceitfulness—against the deep devices of your arch-enemy, the tempter—against the false and unscriptural principles of the world around, the spurious morality which passes current among men—what but "this book of the law"?—this book which in its revelations is pure, unerring, truth—which in its precepts is all pure in holiness, all perfect in virtue. But draw near to it ever as remembering that you are listening to the voice of God. Bow down to its revelations therefore as unerring, to its

requirements as authoritative and supreme. (*J. C. Miller, D.D.*) *Meditation and obedience:*—Many devout Christians tell us that they find it profitable to take even a single verse and make it peculiarly the subject of their thoughts throughout each day—to make it the little vein in the mine which they more particularly work out. There can be no doubt that many of the vain and sinful thoughts which pass through our minds and grieve the devout Christian might thus be shut out were the thoughts and memory preoccupied with Divine truth. And if any particularly mourn that their thoughts, when left to themselves, are so discursive and unprofitable, that they know so little of religious meditation, it may be well for them thus to choose one verse of their daily portion and make it, so to say, the text of their day's thoughts. Let them endeavour to fix its meaning, let them follow out the train of thought to which it leads, let them pray over it in a special manner. And all this with a view more particularly to self-application. But our duty ends not here. The seaman studies his chart and has his compasses on board, not for mere scientific experiments, but that he may voyage in safety to the haven whither he would go, amid the rocks and shoals and quicksands which beset his track. We may not then imagine that all is done when our verses or chapters, our portion, however long, is again punctually gone through. There is a danger of this, as there is a danger of a mere formal lip-service in our prayers. For, as to say prayers is not necessarily to pray, so there is a reading of the Word of God with the mind and the lip only. Our hearts must be the readers, as our hearts must be the petitioners. And then throughout the day the duties here enjoined must be practised, the sins denounced forsaken and shunned, the tempers here set forth as unchristian struggled with, the promises here given lived on, the heaven here proffered sought, the Saviour and the God of whom we read glorified. (*Ibid.*) *Meditation:*—When the impious King Antiochus entered the temple of Jerusalem to lay it waste, his first act was to remove the golden altar and the candlestick, which was also of gold. The devil acts in the same manner when he intends to deprive of spiritual good that soul which is the temple of the living God: he takes from it the altar—that is, fervour of mind; he removes from it the candlestick—that is, the light which makes known the eternal maxims. **Then thou shalt make thy way prosperous.**—*The prosperous way:*—God's blessing is ever upon His people, and He will ever cause that the way of His commandments shall be found the way of happiness and good. Therefore it is true that His people's way is a prosperous way, that they "have good success." The Old Testament promise is—"whatsoever thou doest it shall prosper"—the New, "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God." Is not such a man prospering? All may be disappointment and failure to flesh and blood, and in the estimate of sense. He may not know or see or feel his prosperity at this moment, and while "all things" are working together. But when they have worked and their end is seen, that end shall be found an end of blessing and prosperity. For in the emphatic language of the Psalm, "The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous." His path with them may be dark, and hard, and thorny, but it is right; for their path towards Him is obedience and holiness. In what but blessedness can that path issue "which the Lord approveth"? Would ye know, then, whether God's blessing is at this moment upon your path? Is it a path in which you are guided by His Word, in which you are taking it as a lamp to your feet, as your counsellor and your delight? If so—let it be hard—it is blessed! Let it be tedious—your Father's face of love is shining full upon it. Or if at this moment some cloud is casting over it its gloomy shadow, that cloud will soon be gone, having burst in mercy upon your head. (*J. C. Miller, D.D.*) **The Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.**—*God with the good:*—The Lord, whose command is universal; God, whose power is invincible; the Lord thy God, whose mercies are incomprehensible, is with thee whithersoever thou goest. If the Lord thy God be with thee, His wisdom is with thee to direct thee, His power to protect thee, His strength to support thee, His goodness to maintain thee, His bounty to reward thee, His word to encourage thee, and if thou die under His banner, His angels presently to carry thee into heaven. Where the Israelites lamentably deplore their ill success in war, they attribute it to God's absence. "Thou goest not forth," say they, "with our armies." The Lacedæmonians, being overtaken by the Persian horse and overwhelmed with great flights of arrows, did notwithstanding quietly sit still, without making any resistance at all, or defence, till the sacrifices for victory were happily ended; yea, though many were sore hurt, and some slain outright before any good sign appeared in the entrails; but as soon as their general,

Pausanias, had found good tokens of victory, and persuaded his soldiers of the Divine approbation of their war, they arose, and with excellent courage first received the charge of the barbarians, and after charged them afresh, and slew Mardonius, the Persian general, and many thousands of the rest, and got the day. If the conjectural hope of the aid and assistance of a sainted deity put such courage and resolution into the Lacedæmonians, shall not faith in the true God and confidence in His help breed better blood, and infuse nobler spirits into the hearts of God's warriors and Christian soldiers? God can save His, and overcome the enemy as well with small forces as with great, but all the forces in the world without Him have no force at all. (*D. Featley, D.D.*) *An inspiring presence*:—When Napoleon first started to fight our country and Austria, do you know what our soldiers called him? It was "Wee One-hundred-thousand-men." That was a fine name. It was a grand testimony to the power of the little Napoleon in the midst of his army. They asked one another, "Is 'Wee One-hundred-thousand-men' in the army to-day?" He was worth that number of men. Please tell me at what figure you rate the Son of God. Is He in the battle to-day? (*J. Robertson.*) *The presence of the Master*:—Bacon has well said, that a dog is brave and generous when he believes himself backed by his master, but timid and crouching, especially in a strange place, when he is alone and his master away; and a human master, says the philosopher, is as a god to the dog.

Vers. 10, 11. **Within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan.**—*Three days' pause*:—I. WHAT THIS PAUSE MEANT. "Three days" is a recognised period in Scripture for death and resurrection. But there was another and deeper reason for the delay, which closely touches one of the greatest principles of the inner life. When Israel reached its banks, the Jordan was in flood, and overflowing the low-lying lands on either side of its bed. Across the river stood Jericho, embosomed in palms and tamarisks, in a very paradise of exquisite vegetation, its aromatic shrubs and gardens scenting the air. But as the people beheld it, all their cherished hopes of taking it by their own energy or courage must have been utterly dissipated. What could they do in face of that broad expanse of rushing, foaming, turbulent waters? Multitudes have come to the brink of that river, and have been left there, waiting on its banks, that they might consider the meaning of those impassable waters, and carry away the sentence of death in themselves. Abraham waited there for more than twenty years face to face with the apparent impossibility of ever having a son. David waited there for almost as long, and it must have seemed that the kingdom foretold to him as a youth lay on the other side of insurmountable difficulties. Many a saint since then has been brought down to these same banks, and has stood to witness these flowing streams. What though the promise of God has offered all manner of blessedness and delight! That river! That flooded, fordless, bridgeless, boatless river! Are you there now? Do not hasten from it. Stand still and consider it until the energy and impetuosity of your self-life lies down. You can never reach the blessed life by resolutions, or pledges, or forms of covenant; your good self is as powerless now as your bad self was formerly; you must learn that your strength is to sit still, and that the rich blessings of God stored in Christ for you are an absolute gift to be received by the outstretched hand of faith. II. HOW THIS PAUSE WAS SPENT. During this space of three days events transpired which are both interesting and typical. Amongst other things Jericho was entered by the two spies. 1. Jericho may fitly stand for the world of men over which judgment is impending, but which goes on its way unheeding. Rahab, the poor outcast of Jericho, who had such strange faith in God, entered in with the people to possess the land that flowed with milk and honey. She is thus the type of Gentile-sinners who are permitted to share in the unsearchable riches of Christ, to sit with Him in the heavenlies, to form part of that new race which is gathering around the true Joshua, the Lord from heaven. 2. During this brief pause Joshua also had an opportunity of ascertaining the feelings of the two tribes and a half. Are not these the type of Christians to whom the land of promise is as freely open as to others, and who make an incursion into it with no thought of remaining? They are willing to meet and measure their strength with the seven nations of Canaan, but they are not prepared to abandon the strong facinations of the world, and to settle down to a life hidden with Christ in God. The end of such is but too clearly suggested by the fate of those Eastern tribes. They had their much grass, but they became gradually cut off from the corporate life of Israel. They gave few great names to the roll of saints and heroes emblazoned

on Israel's story. They fell first beneath the invasions of Assyria, and were swept into captivity, from which they never returned. III. How the pause ended. On the third day the hosts seem to have come nearer the river's brink, and their tents were pitched for the night within close proximity to the hurrying waters. It was then that Joshua said unto the people, "Sanctify yourselves," &c. From which it would seem that the wonder-working power of God is dependent upon the sanctification of His people. "Why art Thou as a mighty man that cannot save?" "He could do no mighty works there, because of their unbelief." We all want to see wonders wrought by God—in our own characters, that the fir-tree may replace the thorn and the myrtle the briar; in our homes, that the desert places may blossom with roses; in our Churches, that they may arise and put on their beautiful garments. Oh! for another Pentecost! Oh! to see converts fly as doves to their windows! And why is it that we strain our eyes for them in vain? Is it not because we have not sanctified ourselves? Sanctification means the cleansing of the soul, and the putting on of the white robes of purity and humility. We are not clean enough for God to use us. We are not humble enough to bear a great success. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Crossing the Jordan:*—Many good people daily pray against sudden death, and there are legitimate reasons for so doing; but to a child of God it is of small consequence, for death will never find him unprepared if he is living in communion with God. We will enter into the joy of our Lord, and be for ever with Him. When God's children have their candle lighted for them, and they know that it is time to go upstairs, they feel glad to end their pilgrimage, and rest in Jesus. We are all of us much nearer home than we think. It will be greatly wise to talk with our last hours, and to anticipate that time when the message shall come, "Within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan." I. Observe the tenor of this notice. Notice that there are three leading words in it: "prepare," "pass over," "possess." The first word that came to them was, "Prepare." Be in journeying order. The soldier carries his rations with him when he has to make a quick march: "Prepare you victuals." Children of God, be ready to go from this world. But inasmuch as he said, "Prepare you victuals" did he not mean "Begin to feed on food of that sort upon which you are henceforth to live"? The manna would cease in three days, and never fall again. After they crossed the Jordan, they would feed on the corn of the land. Feed on Christ, feed on spiritual food, feed on the pure truth of God's Word, and feed your souls on nothing else. Know the taste of what you eat, and let it be as clear and definite as that of butter and honey, that so you may steadily refuse the evil and choose the good. Joshua meant—Stand ready, for the time is getting very short. There is not long to wait. Soon you will have traversed the stream, and landed on the hither shore. How would you feel if you knew that within three days you must die? The exhortation given in ver. 13 is one which may be useful also to us: "Remember the word." It is a grand help for going over Jordan if we will remember the word of the Lord. Our faith enables us both to live and to die on the promise of God. But then he said also, "Sanctify yourselves" (chap. iii. 5). If we knew we were to die in three days, should we not wish to put our hearts, our thoughts, our families, into a better state? Since we may die suddenly, let us purify ourselves of all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit. The next word was, "Pass over this Jordan." They were not called to linger on the brink, nor to sit with their feet in the stream, but to cross over it. Israel had been forty years in the wilderness, and surely that was long enough. He who hath served his God with all his heart will not wish to linger a moment after his life-work is done. You are not called to linger on the bed of sickness for ages, but to pass over to your rest. And notice, the call was not to go down into the Jordan to stop there. Blessed be God, we are not going down into the grave to be lost there; but we make use of it as an opened door to paradise. The third word was "possess." They were to pass the river to possess the land which God had given them. We possess nothing here. Those goods which we think we possess melt away like an icicle from a hot hand. But we have on the other side of Jordan treasures worth owning. By a covenant of salt, God has given us in Christ Jesus everlasting rest, triumph, happiness, glory. II. Observe the sequel of this notice, or what followed upon the summons. The first thing that happened to Israel was this, a singular faith was bestowed. I can hardly believe that the people under Joshua were the children of those unbelieving Jews whose carcases fell in the wilderness; for throughout the early chapters of Joshua it is recorded that they believed Joshua, whatever he said to them. He had strange and strong things to utter, but they did not doubt or demur. Now,

when the children of God come to die, those of them who have been poor, trembling things before, receive new courage and unwonted strength, and even minister comfort to those who are stronger than themselves. It is brave to see how Mr. Ready-to-halt puts his crutches away when he is going over Jordan. Mr. Feeble-mind bids them bury his feeble mind in a dunghill, for it would be of no use to anybody. The Lord will give us more grace, and we shall wonder at ourselves that we could have been aforetime so distrustful. "At eventide it shall be light." Next, a special assurance was given: "To-morrow the Lord will do wonders among you" (chap. iii. 5). The Lord is always working marvels; but when we come to cross the Jordan we shall see His wonders in the deep. Next, note that the people had with them a conquering leader. Joshua was at their head, to encourage and direct them. When you and I shall pass over Jordan we shall have Jesus with us. He says, "Be of good cheer. Because I live, ye shall live also." But what next? The Israelites had a clear guidance afforded them (chap. iii. 4). You have been through many experiences, but to die will be a new one. Once for all, you must cross this Jordan, therefore the Divine presence shall go before you, and show you the way. Oh, yes, you shall have Divine direction when the darkness gathers about you! With Israel a forerunner led the way. So our great High Priest has tasted death for every man. Nor did the forerunner quit the scene, for the Divine presence remained. The priests went on till they came to the river-bed, and descended the hollow, going on to the very centre of it. There they stopped till all the host had passed over. The Lord Jesus will go before you as your great High Priest, your propitiation and your covenant; and He will abide with you in the last solemn article until you are safe landed on the shore of the land of promise. In consequence of the priests going down into the river the stream was dried up. Wonderful sight it must have been to behold the waters roll back, and stand in a congealed heap. Thus there was a broad passage-way for the multitudes of Israel to go marching through, and to effect the crossing rapidly. Suppose, when you come to die, the Jordan should turn out to be no river at all. What if you should go over dry-shod? Why should it not be so? Death is a pin's prick to many. Death hath lost its terrors. "The sting of death is sin," and that is forgiven. "The strength of sin is the law," and that is fulfilled. The black waters have failed; we pass over Jordan dry-shod. Then notice, the people were very quick in crossing. Death is short work. After all, what is the act of death? "What!" cries one, "is there not a terrible amount of pain connected with death?" I answer, "No." It is life that has the pain; death is the finis of all pain. You blame death for a disease of which he is the cure. You imagine a thing called death which does not really exist. In the twinkling of an eye we shall be up and away! Therefore, because you will haste to pass over, you need not be alarmed at so short a trial, which will actually turn out to be no trial at all. We read in chap. iv. 9 that the Israelites in traversing the Jordan left a memorial behind. You also will bear your testimony in departing: you will set up your memorial for your children after you, and they shall say, "Our father died in sure and certain hope of being with Jesus." Even if your death-bed should not be so bright as some, even its clouds may not be without their effect. A holy man had prayed much for his boys and girls, but never saw them converted, and this, with the troubles which grow out of their waywardness, made his last hours to be sadly clouded. But mark how the Lord wrought! They buried their father, and when they were met together, the eldest son turned to his brothers and remarked, "If our father, who was so good a man, was so troubled in death, what will become of us when we die?" This most reasonable remark was the means of the conversion of the brothers. I would like to die in the dark if it would bring all my people to the Saviour. Would not you? One thing more: they also raised a memorial on the other shore. They piled twelve stones upon each other in Canaan. You and I, when we get to heaven, shall take our memorials with us, and pile them up. We will make known to angels and principalities and powers the manifold wisdom and goodness of God to us in life and death. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Jordan at hand:—I. THE FIRST FEELING EXCITED BY THE ANNOUNCEMENT MUST HAVE BEEN THAT OF JOY AND TRIUMPH. It was not alone on the contrast between its fountains and depths springing out of valleys and hills, and the arid desolation of the great howling wilderness, that the thoughts of the Hebrew rested, but on the contrast of its repose. The sorest trials of his life had not probably been the hunger and the thirst, the laborious journey and the tumult of the battle, but the ceaseless motion—the movement ever on and on. Rest, rest! rest anywhere,

but, above all, in the land that flowed with milk and honey, must have been the innermost desire of his heart. Is not all this applicable to ourselves? It is not the great sorrows of our experience that constitute, after all, the weariness of life; but it is its change, its sense of uncertainty, the consciousness that we keep nothing, call nothing absolutely our own. II. THERE MUST HAVE BLENDED WITH IT A GREAT TRIAL OF FAITH. The chosen land was indeed close at hand. It seemed as if they could almost touch the shore. Just beyond gleamed in the sunshine the towers of Jericho, and blue in the distance were the hills of Judæa. But, close as they seemed, Jordan rolled between, and they could not but ask how they were to cross it. What, then, of that other Jordan, which we all must cross? that death we must all die some time or other, and through which alone we can enter into our Canaan? Let us make sure that what awaits us beyond on the other shore is heaven, and not the darkness. With the act of dying we have nothing whatever to do. It is in God's hands, not ours, and there we must leave it. Has not the ark gone before? III. AN ACT OF PREPARATION NEEDED: "Prepare you victuals." There is nothing actually corresponding to this in the experience of the Christian when he is called to cross into the better land. Special preparation for heaven, the Christian needs none. If he be in Christ, that is enough; he is safe. If he be a believer, he can have no less; and though he were the highest of saints that ever caught the light of the face of God, he could have no more than to be "found in Him, not having his own righteousness," &c. For myself I can conceive nothing more blessed than for a saint to pass at once from the midst of his work for his Master into the enjoyment of his Master's presence. Yet I admit that the near sight of so great a change could not but very solemnly affect us, were the warning given to ourselves. There would be an intense revival of faith and hope, and in that close sight of heaven a flinging away of all earthly and temporal ties. (*E. Garbett, M.A.*) "*Prepare you victuals*":—Sometimes we have heard words like these fall from Christian workers: "I have faith to believe that God will provide the means necessary to carry on this work," and straightway they assume liabilities and enter into engagements, and incur debts, in violation of the plain command, "Owe no man anything"; yea, they even sometimes accuse their brethren of lack of faith because they cannot do God's work in this way. This is not good. To obey is better than to profess great faith; and to hearken than sentimental unthinking zeal. What would we have thought of Joshua if after he had received the Divine order to march forward he had said, "I have faith to believe that God will provide the food necessary for victualling the army all through the campaign; our commissariat is absolutely safe, for it is in Divine hands. God has promised to be with me as He was with Moses, I have no need to think of these things. All I have got to do is to hasten forward." Nay, nay! Joshua manifested his faith in a much more Divine fashion. "Prepare you victuals," he said; do not expect that miraculous supply which has been granted for forty years, now that you are in a position to do without it. You are no longer helpless children, but grown men able to provide for yourselves. The battle is the Lord's, and He will not fail us nor forsake us, but we must use all reasonable foresight in carrying on His work. We dare do nothing, we dare omit nothing, out of harmony with His ways. (*A. B. Mackay.*) *Self-help necessary*:—Joshua reminds us of the famous order attributed to Cromwell, "Trust in God, and keep your powder dry." His piety was very unlike that of a certain Duke of Parma, of whom it is written that, in a great crisis, "while he had been praying, and nothing more, the English had been praying, and something more." He acted in the spirit of the proverb, "God helps those who help themselves." (*T. W. M. Lund, M.A.*) "*Ye shall pass over*":—"Oh," but they might have said, "we cannot pass over Jordan, because there is Jericho right in front of us, and of course the inhabitants will call in the Jebusites, who are not far off, at Jerusalem, and these will fetch in the Hivites, and the Amorites, and all the other nations; and these will hotly dispute the passage of the river, and it will be out of the question to force our way through that torrent, and fight up the other bank against such foes." Such a fear would be most natural. When Cæsar tried to land in England, what did the Britons do? They rushed into the water off Dover to meet the Romans, and they fought with them in the surf of the sea. It was natural that brave men should fight the invaders in the water, and not suffer them to tread their soil. Do you suppose that the Canaanites were less brave than the ancient Britons? Had there not been a spell upon them, they would have pressed back Israel in the river itself, and would not have allowed them to enter the land. Yet Israel passed over Jordan

at the appointed time. God had said, "Ye shall go over," and they did go over; and no Canaanite, Hivite, or Jebusite dared to molest them. So the poor child of God sighs, "Alas! when I come to die, Satan will meet me, temptations and doubts and fears will rush upon me." We read in chap. iii. 16, "And the people passed over right against Jericho." Fear not, O, trembling heart. God can so deal with evil spirits, and with the doubts of your own spirit, that they shall be still as a stone till you have passed over. No demon shall dare to peep or mutter. No doubt or fear shall venture near. We read, "All the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan." Not an arrow or a stone came from over the walls of Jericho. Glory be to the name of the Lord, He made the hearts of Israel's enemies to melt, so that no more courage remained in them. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Vers. 12–18. **Ye shall pass before your brethren armed.**—*Joshua's demand for the services of the trans-Jordanic tribes:*—In making this demand he declares their duty plainly, supports it with reasons, and enforces it with firmness. The demand he made was authoritative. It was founded on a past transaction to which they had agreed. He showed that this was nothing more than the carrying out of an arrangement previously made. From this it would not be lawful to deviate, for the commandment of Moses in regard to this was the word of the Lord. The demand was also reasonable. The raw lads and the worn-out soldiers, as well as the inferior men, may stay at home to do garrison duty, the veterans must march with him. Surely this is sensible. It is always wise to put the best men to the most difficult work. In fulfilling this commission of the true Joshua, has the Church always acted with equal wisdom and fidelity? It did so in the purest and palmiest days of missionary effort, when, filled with the spirit of wisdom and love and power, it broke forth on the right and left and speedily overran the known world. Now it seems as if all the mighty men of valour should stay at home to nurse the feeble spark of the Church's vitality, while the striplings go to the wars. Yea, are there not some who, instead of evangelising among the heathen, expend all their energy in proselytising among Christians? The demand made by Joshua on the pastoral tribes was also equitable. "You have rest," he might have said; "your brethren have not. You got rest through their help, therefore you are bound to help them to the same blessing. The command of Moses in regard to this was acquiesced in by you, therefore truth and honour require its faithful carrying out." Moreover, what an unseemly picture it would have presented, to have seen part of the nation fighting hard, while their brethren sat still and looked on in ignoble ease. And how shortsighted would this policy of idleness have been. Only by the speedy and thorough conquest of all the land could the heritage of any tribe be kept in pleasant and unquestioned possession. To march with Joshua was the wisest, as well as the most seemly thing these tribes could do. Surely the same arguments could be urged with equal force as incentives to the grand work of world-wide Christian testimony. (*A. B. Mackay.*) **All that thou commandest us we will do.**—*Brave responses:*—The response of the people was as noble in its way as that of their leader. There is a holy rivalry between Israel and Joshua. They stir each other up to the great work that has to be done. The outstanding feature in the response of the people is its enthusiasm. It is plain from their response that they are heart and soul in the work before them, that they are only waiting for their leader's command to march forth a band of heroes. To say that their reply to Joshua was hearty would be to do them injustice; it was enthusiastic. Every soul in the camp was stirred to its utmost depth. This is plain from the readiness with which they replied. They did not hang back, waiting for each other to speak out. Much less did they hunt up excuses why they should not march. They did not modify or minimise their responsibilities. They were as eager to follow Joshua as Joshua was to follow Jehovah. This enthusiasm was also manifested by their cheerfulness. These men had not only promised to put their hands to this work, but also made it plain that they felt it their highest privilege to be able to do so. Oh! for such holy enthusiasm in the work of the Lord in these days! The best of us are but half-hearted at the best, and some, alas! seem utterly unable to get up the least spark of enthusiasm for holy things. If we profess to be Christians, if we profess to do God's work, if we profess to respond to the call of the true Joshua, let us do it, not like galley-slaves, but like God's freemen; let us do it as those who think His service our highest honour. Joshua's followers

were also unreserved in acknowledging their allegiance. They kept nothing back and made no reservation. They asked no questions and imposed no conditions. Is obedience, prompt and unquestioning, the first duty of a soldier? See how splendidly it was possessed by these Israelites. They declare that it is not for them to make reply, not for them to reason why, but simply, constantly, to do all that was commanded them. And if such glorious allegiance was due to Joshua, much more it is due to our great Captain of salvation, Jesus Christ. Whatsoever He commands in His Word we should do. Wheresoever He sends us in His providence we should go. The response of the people was also humble, sincere, earnest, and hopeful. A slight transformation in the opening words of ver. 17 makes their meaning more clear. It should read thus: "According to all in which we hearkened to Moses so will we hearken unto thee." They do not here brag of their obedience to Moses. Though better than their fathers, they had nothing to boast of, and conscious of their own weakness they merely said, "We will try to make our best obedience to Moses the model of our obedience to you." And there is good hope that they will succeed in carrying out this promise, for it is plain that they make it in a prayerful spirit, inasmuch as they follow it up by saying, "Only the Lord be with thee as He was with Moses." This is no impertinent limitation, qualifying their full allegiance as already given; but an earnest prayer that Joshua might constantly enjoy the Divine guidance, protection, and blessing vouchsafed to Moses. Then they finish their response by words vehement and uncompromising: "Whosoever he be that doth rebel against thy commandment, and will not hearken unto thy words in all that thou commandest him, let him be put to death." What more could a leader desire than such a spontaneous manifestation of fidelity? How must this declaration have strengthened Joshua's heart, showing so clearly as it did that his appointment to the leadership by Jehovah was so heartily ratified by all the people. (*A. B. Mackay.*) *The moral advantages of good organisation*:—1. Society must have leadership, and leadership must be a question of competence. There are three things about the true leader which are most notable—(1) He must be directly called of God. Moses was; Joshua was. (2) Being directly called of God, he will walk constantly in the Divine counsel: "This book of the law shall not depart," &c. (3) Walking constantly in the Divine counsel, he shall achieve the most distinguished success. This is God's promise. 2. Organisation is as much required in the Church as in the army. The mature thinker, the new-born Christian, the untried youth, the undisciplined mind, and the cultivated intellect, cannot be equal, and ought not to have equal authority in the Church. I. SUCH ORGANISATION WOULD FACILITATE THE DEVELOPMENT OF INDIVIDUAL TALENT. In the absence of wise organisation, the modest man will be ignored or crushed. He will have no power and no disposition to cope with the self-asserting and blustering men who worship their own infallibility. For the moment insolence will vanquish genius, simply because genius disdains the rude weapons which insolence adopts, and cares not to fight where even victory would be disgrace. II. SUCH ORGANISATION WOULD CONSOLIDATE THE CHRISTIAN SOCIETY ASSEMBLING IN ONE PLACE. The army is a compact confederacy. Its consolidation is its strength. Break up its wisely arranged gradations, and its power is paralysed. The same principle has its bearing upon the Church. III. SUCH ORGANISATION WOULD PRESENT THE MOST FORMIDABLE FRONT TO THE ENEMY. Every man in his place, every man moving at the same word of command, every man living for the common good—let that programme be carried out, and no power can withstand the united influence of Christ's believers. Disorder is weakness; disorder is waste! IV. SUCH ORGANISATION WOULD PROMOTE A MOST HEALTHFUL SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE. The organisation which God appoints is calculated to train men to habits of self-dominion. The young man is held in check; the passionate man is subdued; the lethargic man is quickened; and each nature has the advantage of association with natures of a different type. The organisation thus commended is not merely mechanical; it is the order which comes of a living love, which is willing to do the most good in the least time. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Fidelity to engagements*:—There was no going back from their word, even though they might have found a loophole of escape. They might have said that as the conquest of Sihon and Og had been accomplished so easily, so the conquest of the western tribes would be equally simple. Or they might have said that the nine tribes and a half could furnish quite a large enough army to dispossess the Canaanites. Or they might have discovered that their wives and children were exposed to dangers they had not

apprehended, and that it would be necessary for the entire body of the men to remain and protect them. But they fell back on no such after-thought. They kept their word at no small cost of toil and danger, and furnished thereby a perpetual lesson for those who, having made a promise under pressure, are tempted to retire from it when the pressure is removed. Fidelity to engagements is a noble quality, just as laxity in regard to them is a miserable sin. Even pagan Rome could boast of a Regulus who kept his oath by returning to Carthage, though it was to encounter a miserable death. In Psalm xv. it is a feature in the portrait of the man who is to abide in God's tabernacle and dwell in His holy hill, that he "sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not." (*W. G. Blaikie, D.D.*)

The Lord thy God be with thee.—*Prayers for men in public offices*:—Rulers who answer the end of their office as guardians of civil and religious liberty are pillars of a land. They uphold and support it, and keep it from tottering and sinking. We should pray for them—1. That they may be endued with every grace and virtue which can animate to the faithful and diligent execution of the duties of their office. If piety, true patriotism, and zeal for the interests of religion are at present less conspicuous in many who hold civil or military offices than they have been in some former periods, there is the greater need to beseech Him, with whom is the residue of the Spirit, to pour out abundantly. 2. We should pray that all in offices, civil or military, may be endued with the gifts and talents necessary for the honourable discharge of their several offices. Capacity and genius, as well as good dispositions, are requisite for serving the public. It is from Divine influence that rulers diligently search what conduct is just and wise; hearken to salutary advice, from whatever quarter it comes; and have clear understandings to discern, and sound judgments to choose the right path, even in situations the most intricate and perplexed. 3. We should pray that, in consequence of good dispositions and eminent abilities, rulers may actually adopt the measures which best tend to promote the public good. It is not enough that a ruler avoids, in his own practice, whatever may embolden wickedness, and recommends, by an exemplary conduct, that righteousness which exalteth a nation. He must vigorously enforce and execute the laws already established for restraining wrong and wicked lewdness, and help forward the enacting of such new laws as may be needful for restraining them more effectually. 4. We should pray God to prosper the endeavours of all in civil and military offices for promoting the public good. (*John Erskine, D.D.*)

CHAPTER II.

VERS. 1–24. Joshua . . . sent out . . . two men to spy.—*The spies despatched*:—I. THE POSITION IN WHICH JOSHUA AND THE ISRAELITES WERE PLACED. It was a difficult task that had been performed by Moses; did not a harder remain? It was something to lead such a host through the wilderness. Surely more is required now the armour is to be put on, active service entered, and they brought face to face with their foes. But was not Joshua specially called to the onerous duty? Certainly he was! We have been called to a work individually, collectively. God has promised success in it; the work is that of dispossessing before possessing. We are to enjoy the companionship of God in it. Still, like Joshua, we have to depend on that word of promise. The comparison is in our favour. We have the example of all the generations from Joshua till the present. These have been strengthened by the life of Christ. In Him we have a volume of testimony confirmatory of our highest hopes. II. THAT ALL THESE PROMISES DO NOT PRECLUDE THE USE OF PROPER MEANS. What are the feelings of a child when receiving a promise from an earthly parent? Does not the promise heighten affection, induce carefulness, and prompt to obedience? Who ever knew a child made neglectful by a well-timed promise? Is not man the same in all his relations—is he not still a man, though dealing with God? What are the effects of His promises—do they not in every way stimulate to increased affection and zeal? To expect without working is to tempt God—to work without expecting is to dishonour Him. In all that has been and is now doing in the world for God, we find the principle of co-operation prevailing. God works out His purposes by human instrumentalities—men, organised into Churches, in their collective or individual capacity, work, and God crowns with success. Man

without God can do nothing. God without man does nothing, and although we have the assurance that through our instrumentality the fortresses of sin shall be vanquished, and the flag of our Master float upon the ramparts, we are bound carefully to consider our steps, and to use all our God-given powers to accomplish the object. We have our Jericho in the world. Adult world—juvenile world—spy the land, call into action all your powers; God will surely give you the land to possess. III. THE WILLINGNESS ON THE PART OF THE MEN TO UNDERTAKE THE DIFFICULT WORK. They respond at once to the call of their leader, and trusting in God are honoured with success. With this spirit thoroughly in our Churches, what a large amount of work we should do. We seem to think the time for special workings and special deliverances has past. Nay, this is the time; that army on the east of Jordan is but a picture of ourselves. The work is before us. There runs a river between us and our work; yes, and we thank God for it. If we could, we would not on any account remove it. It is the right order of things. He that would do any work must cross it, and we may take it for granted the width, depth, and swiftness of the stream will be proportioned to the value of the work. Earnest workers will cross it, manfully trusting in God, and these are the only successful workers. (*J. H. Snell.*) *Beginning at the right point:*—From military wisdom we may learn the moral wisdom of always striking first at the right point. Everything turns upon the first stroke in many a controversy and in many an arduous battle. Why do men come home at eventide saying the day has been wasted? Because their very first step in the morning was in the wrong direction, or the very first word they spoke was the word they ought not to have uttered. With all thy getting, get understanding of how to begin life, where to strike first, what to do and when to do it, and exactly how much of it to do within given time. If you strike the wrong place you will waste your strength, and the walls of the city will remain unshaken. A blow delivered at the right place and at the right time will have tenfold effect over blows that are struck in the dark and at random: however energetic they may be, and however well delivered, they fall upon the wrong place, and the result is nothing. That is what is meant by wasted lives. Men have been industrious, painstaking, even anxious in thoughtfulness, and the night has been encroached upon so that the time of rest might be turned into a time of labour; yet all has come to nothing: no city has been taken, no position has been established, no progress has been made. Why? Simply because they did not begin at the right point. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) Rahab.—*An unexpected ally of the Lord's host; or, Rahab and her faith:*—Imaginative writers have pictured Rahab as attired in gaudy costume, going about the city with her harp (Isa. xxiii. 16), and at this very time in pursuit of her evil trade. Others, following Josephus, have adopted so charitable an estimate of her profession as to suppose her to have been simply a tavern-keeper. May we not, perhaps, take a middle line, and venture to believe that one who had become a believer in the God of Israel had also, ere this, repented of and forsaken the infamous life which her title imports. She appears from the narrative to be supporting herself by her own industry, in the preparation and dyeing of flax. One thing is certain, and that is that pure and saving faith cannot exist with foul and deadly sins. In reference to Rahab's faith, observe—I. THE WONDER OF ITS EXISTENCE. Here dwells an unfortunate woman. She has had no spiritual advantages —no Sabbaths, no Scriptures, no teachers—and yet in the base purlieus of a Jericho, in the heart of that poor harlot, like a fair pearl that lies within a rough shell among the weeds and rocks at the sea bottom, there is found precious faith, faith that finds utterance in a good confession (ver. 11). Here is encouragement for those who are called, in the providence of God, to minister where worldliness and frivolity, and pride and bitter opposition to the truth prevail. Here, too, is encouragement for those who minister in uncouth regions, where sin and ignorance seem to shut out hope of blessing. Let missionaries and visitors in alleys and courts, in attics and cellars, which seem like nests of blasphemy and impurity, take heart. The unholy atmosphere of gin palaces, and even of houses like that in which Joshua's spies sought refuge, cannot exclude the Holy Ghost, or nullify the Gospel message. II. ITS PRACTICAL OPERATION. A poetic faith may lift its possessor to the heavens in ecstacies. A talking faith may delight the hearers with glowing descriptions of supposed experiences and imaginary prospects. But the faith that saves is known by its works. Such a faith was Rahab's. Her faith wrought with her works, and by works was her faith made perfect. III. ITS SAVING TENDENCY. The characteristic of true faith is ever to tend towards salvation. Faith accepts the warnings of the Word of God as true, and leads men to flee from the

wrath to come. Now we shall find this to be a marked characteristic in the faith of Rahab. It inclines her to seek salvation both for herself and for her kindred. IV. ITS RICH REWARD. Vain are man's promises of help except God approve the pledge. The oath of the spies to deliver Rahab and her house had availed her nothing had not God Himself, by a notable miracle, confirmed their word. Joshua held himself bound by the covenant of his representatives; but what was more, the Lord accepted Rahab's faith and spared her house, or, when the walls of Jericho fell down, her house had fallen too, for it abutted on the wall. But it fell not, but stood unscathed amid the overthrow, a monument of Divine faithfulness and mercy. Nor will that faithfulness and mercy fail to save any, even the most unworthy, who has entered into the covenant of grace. "Our life for yours!" may every ambassador of the gospel say. If the conditions of salvation be observed, thy house and thy hope shall stand, though a thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand. (*G. W. Butler, M.A.*) *A parenthesis of grace*:—Let us look at Rahab's faith, and meditate on a few of its phases. I. Consider the HINDRANCES of her faith. 1. There were hindrances which arose from herself. She was the harlot Rahab. Her character was exceptionally evil. She belonged to a class than whom there are none more hardened, inaccessible, and hopeless. Moreover, she had found her calling profitable, and therefore, naturally speaking, would be the more firmly wedded to her evil ways. Moreover, Israel is coming to Jericho for the purpose of executing the Divine vengeance on the very evils of which she is guilty. The cry of the Canaanites has ascended to heaven; in long-suffering patience God has waited till now, but at last He has sent forth His hosts to consume them utterly. How much, then, was there, in herself, to keep Rahab from trust in Jehovah! 2. There were also hindrances to Rahab's faith arising from her natural friends. The example of all her neighbours would encourage her in a path of unbelief. Her faith would make her an oddity in Jericho. 3. There were hindrances to her faith arising from her natural enemies. Israel, the people of Jehovah, were arrayed against her and her people, and were even now marching onward to their destruction. The mission of Israel is not one of mercy, but of judgment. Their feet are not beautiful upon the mountains, bringing good tidings of peace. They bring no gospel to the Canaanites, but war, disaster, and death are in their invincible path. How black was the outlook for Rahab. II. Consider THE OPPORTUNITY of her faith. Faith always finds, or rather God always gives to faith, an opportunity for its manifestation. As in the day of Sodom's doom, the Lord delayed till righteous Lot had escaped to Zoar, saying, "I cannot do anything till thou be come thither," so now, if there is a single soul in Jericho groping after Him in the darkness of vice and heathenism, He will delay the march of His destroying hosts, to give that soul the opportunity which it requires and for which it longs. He can do nothing in judgment till that one soul in the doomed city is brought into a place of safety. Thus this pause in the Divine and just act of judgment, this parenthesis of grace, this long-suffering of God, is salvation. III. Consider THE OPERATION of her faith. Rahab showed her faith by her works. We cannot, and do not, defend the deliberate falsehood by which she misled her fellow citizens in search of the spies; but we must remember that her whole training from childhood had been in lies, and that this was a sudden emergency. She was no well-instructed saint, walking under the light of God's countenance, but a great sinner groping after Him. There is sufficient in her conduct to manifest a heart truly sincere and anxiously solicitous for the welfare of God's people, willing to risk her own life to save theirs. IV. Turn now to THE CONFESSION of her faith. He that believes with the heart confesses with the mouth. All the believing add to their faith virtue, boldness in confessing the truth; all are witnesses. To the spies Rahab said, "I know that the Lord hath given you the land," &c. She does not say, "I think," "I suppose," "I fear," but "I know." She believes as firmly in the promises of God as any in Israel. And as she believes in the promises of God, so she believes in the God of the promises. How clear and unmistakable is her confession of the name of Jehovah; how high, and exalted, and spiritual; how wonderful, in the mouth of one trained from infancy to worship stocks and stones, trained to think that the power of the different deities was local and circumscribed: "The Lord your God, He is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath"! V. Next let us ponder THE TRIAL of her faith. Faith is always tested, that it may be manifested as Divine. Had Rahab sought to add anything to the instructions of the spies, had she consulted her own ideas as to the best means of ensuring her safety, she would have manifested her folly, and would have miserably failed.

So trust in any other means than those which God has provided, trust in anything but the blood of the Lamb, is a manifestation of folly and a sure cause of failure. VI. Consider also THE SOLICITUDE of her faith. She was anxious not only about her own safety, but about that of those who were dear to her. She was not selfishly absorbed in looking after her own welfare, content if she herself escaped; but, with true affection, arranged for the rescue of her relatives. The work of Rahab, in bringing in others, is similar to that of every saved soul. After we ourselves are saved we are not to rest content; we are not to sit down in idleness and ease because all is well with us for ever. We are to bear on our hearts those who are still exposed to the Divine judgment; we are to be up and doing, instant in season and out of season, if by any means we may save some. VII. Consider THE REWARD of her faith. When the dread day of Jericho's judgment came, what a joy must it have been to Rahab to know that all dear to her were safe. But who can tell the rapture of those who have saved a soul from eternal death, and covered a multitude of sins? Surely such a glorious reward, such a monument of everlasting renown, is worth labouring for, worth living for, worth dying for. But turning again to the case before us, why did the multitudes in Jericho thus perish without pity? Was it because the cup of their iniquity was full? Yes, truly, for they had fearfully corrupted their ways. But, while many sins characterised the Canaanites, the Holy Ghost selects one sin as emphatically that which caused their destruction. Which sin? Unbelief. That which distinguished Rahab from the rest was not superior morality, higher intelligence, a more exemplary life, a better natural disposition, but faith in God. She believed; they believed not. Because she believed, she was saved; because they believed not, they perished. Even so, many sins may characterise you, and each one is like a millstone round your neck, fitted to drag you down to endless destruction, but your great, culminating, condemning sin is unbelief (Mark xvi. 16). But Rahab was not only rescued from the judgment of Jericho, she was also received into the number of God's people. Even so the sinner who believes in Jesus is not only saved from wrath to come, but is received into the Church, the house of the living God, there to be instructed more fully in the ways of God; there to learn all the lessons that the grace of God can teach; to deny ungodliness and worldly lust; to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. (*A. B. Mackay.*) *Rahab's reasoning*:—The woman had an eye to see and an ear to hear. She knew better than to suppose that a nation of slaves by their own resources could have eluded all the might of Pharaoh, subsisted for forty years in the wilderness, and annihilated the forces of such renowned potentates as Sihon and Og. She was no philosopher, and could not have reasoned on the doctrine of causation, but her common sense taught her that you cannot have extraordinary effects without corresponding causes. It is one of the great weaknesses of modern unbelief that with all its pretensions to philosophy it is constantly accepting effects without an adequate cause. Jesus Christ, though He revolutionised the world, though He founded an empire to which that of the Cæsars is not for a moment to be compared, though all that were about Him admitted His supernatural power and person, after all was nothing but a man. The gospel that has brought peace and joy to so many weary hearts, that has transformed the slaves of sin into children of heaven, that has turned cannibals into saints, and fashioned so many an angelic character out of the rude blocks of humanity, is but a cunningly devised fable. What contempt for such sophistries, such vain explanations of facts patent to all, would this poor woman have shown! How does she rebuke the many that keep pottering in poor natural explanations of plain supernatural facts instead of manfully admitting that it is the arm of God that has been revealed and the voice of God that has spoken. (*W. G. Blaikie, D.D.*) *Gradual enlightenment*:—If we ask, How could Rahab have such a faith and yet be a harlot? or How could she have such faith in God and yet utter that tissue of falsehoods about the spies with which she deluded the messengers of the king? we answer that light comes but gradually and slowly to persons like Rahab. The conscience is but gradually enlightened. How many men have been slaveholders after they were Christians! Worse than that, did not the godly John Newton, one of the two authors of the Olney hymns, continue for some time in the slave trade, conveying cargoes of his fellow-creatures stolen from their homes, before he awoke to a sense of its infamy? Are there no persons among us calling themselves Christians engaged in traffic that brings awful destruction to the bodies and souls of their fellow-men? That Rahab

should have continued as she was after she threw in her lot with God's people is inconceivable; but there can be no doubt how she was living when she first comes into Bible history. And as to her falsehoods, though some have excused lying when practised in order to save life, we do not vindicate her on that ground. All falsehood, especially what is spoken to those who have a right to trust us, must be offensive to the God of truth, and the nearer men get to the Divine image, through the growing closeness of their Divine fellowship, the more do they recoil from it. Rahab was yet in the outermost circle of the Church, just touching the boundary; the nearer she got to the centre the more would she recoil alike from the foulness and the falseness of her early years. And yet, though her faith may at this time have been but as a grain of mustard seed, we see two effects of it that are not to be despised. One was her protection of the Lord's people, as represented by the spies; the other was her concern for her own relations. (*Ibid.*) *Rahab's faith:*—Faith in the human heart is a Divine work and a Divine wonder. Jesus wondered when He beheld the witness of it in the message of the centurion, and in the cry of the Syro-Phœnician, and sometimes it occurs among circumstances so strange and unlikely as to compel the wonder even of our hard hearts and dull minds. The faith of Rahab is of this class—strange, unaccountable on merely natural grounds. That this plant of heavenly renown should take root and spring up in such uncongenial soil is what we do not naturally look for. Her faith reminds us of a tree we have seen in the Highlands of Scotland. At the bottom of a wild glen stood a huge boulder, which towered high above those which had toppled with it from the mountain side, and it had a strange crown. On its summit, as if rising out of the rock, grew a young tree—green, vigorous, and healthy. From its peculiar position, it attracted the notice of every passer-by; it was the only tree for miles around, and there, in that wilderness, and on that rock, it grew, planted as it were by the finger of God. Even so the faith of Rahab is a great wonder, a tree of paradise, planted by the hand of God, in the midst of a wilderness of moral and spiritual desolation. *A mixed character:*—They are mixed characters and mixed actions in the moral sense; and just as we may take a conglomerate mineral and single out one ingredient for remark, so we may fix our minds upon one aspect of a complex action, disregarding all other aspects for the time, with admiration or condemnation. It is what we do continually. We speak highly of an author's genius—without approval of his principles; we praise the skill of some diplomatist—whose policy we strongly condemn; we do not grudge our admiration to the powers of Napoleon—though we may believe him to have been a monster of iniquity. In a famous essay John Foster illustrates decision of character by a number of striking instances. He refers to the untameable soul of Milton as portrayed in "Paradise Lost"; to the sublime height to which Pompey was raised by his ambitious spirit; to the constancy of purpose with which a Spaniard pursued and at last accomplished his revenge; to the indefatigable industry with which a ruined spendthrift regained his fortune and died a miser. But none is so foolish as to accuse the essayist of commending obstinacy, ambition, revenge, or miserliness. Now, the same principle must be applied to an interpretation of Scripture. The unjust steward, *e.g.*, was a bad man: he was selfish, unprincipled, a downright rogue. But withal he was prudent; he forecast the future; he directed his energies towards providing for it; and he succeeded. In his prudence, then, is he set forth as an example for us. (*Sunday School Times.*) **Our hearts did melt.**—*The powers of evil in terror:*—I think that testimony stands yet. We, who are fighting Joshua's battle to-day, should take to heart this word that has leaked out from the headquarters of the devil's army; and the word is this, that with all the devil's swagger, and bravado, and bluster, he is a bigger coward than we are, and that is big enough. He is really not so bold as he is trying to pretend. He knows that the doom is coming, and Rahab is the testifier; and she ought to know: she has been near him and is intimate with the latest information on that side. I say, I think that we should all take this. It stands here. This is a bit of the Word of God that "liveth and abideth for ever." And its great value to you and me who are fighting to-day in the wars of the Lord under the heavenly Joshua is that, all appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, the fear of us and the terror of us are working yonder before we arrive. God is making a way for His conquering purpose before we thunder at the enemy's gate. Therefore let us nerve ourselves. Therefore let us be strong. Therefore do not let us be daunted by the colossal and seemingly impregnable powers of evil. There is a trembling and a quivering in the devil's

host. "Your terror is fallen upon us." Who would think it, to read the secular press? What nonsense clever men talk about religion, as if it were a feeble kind of thing, such as they would call in Scotland "a fozy turnip"—a half-rotten, effete, useless thing. "We are going to have reforms, and we are going to make things a great deal better, but we will have no religion." Did ever anybody hear such addle-headed talking by clever men? No religion! Oh, indeed! You are going to bow out Jesus Christ? You ought to have been born a long while before you were, if you are going to do that. You have come into the world much too late to put it right without Christ. He is here, and He means to be here, and I trust we are all with Him. Oh, what encouragement there comes to us out of this! What encouragement—that the kingdom of darkness in all its domain is tottering to its fall, and it knows it! Strange it is that we who are serving under the heavenly Joshua, and have all these things to fortify us and to infuse strength into us, are so nervous and womanish. Oh, to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, and to be strengthened by what we read here as to the condition of things in the enemy's camp! They are just about to surrender if we would put on a bold front. (*John McNeill.*) **The Lord your God, He is God.**—*Our God, God over all:*—I. THE LORD YOUR GOD. I am aware that "our Lord" and "our Saviour," and so on, are phrases that are frequently employed thoughtlessly, ignorantly, and profanely; but this does not render their value less. Whatever faith is in exercise, so that the believer can really claim his affinity, his relationship, it is most blessed so to do. Nay, more; there is no solid happiness and permanent peace for any child of Adam until that child of Adam can claim this relationship: "the Lord our God." But oh! "wonder, ye heavens, and be astonished, O earth," at this amazing condescension: that the great Eternal—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—should give to His elect family each of the Persons, and all the perfections and attributes of self-existent Deity, as the Church's portion and inheritance. II. HE IS GOD IN HEAVEN. As for myself, the fact that Jehovah, the covenant God of Israel, is "my God," makes me look up to heaven and think of heaven with the utmost confidence; aye, without a scruple; aye, upon scriptural assurance of calling it my home. Now, mark two or three things arising out of this fact that "He is God in heaven above." All the records of heaven written and kept by Him; all the enjoyments of heaven bestowed, communicated, imparted, in His presence; all the inhabitants of heaven His own choice, His own redemption, His own workmanship. He is absolute Sovereign "in heaven" of the fixed decrees of heaven; absolute Sovereign "in heaven" of all the glories of heaven; and absolute Sovereign "in heaven" of all the inhabitants of heaven. Oh! what security is here! "The Lord your God is God in heaven above." III. HE IS GOD IN EARTH BENEATH. Here we have a solution of the mystery of His providence. He is God in earth, as well as in heaven; tell Him all about it. Go with thy sorrows, thy cares, thy domestic woes, thy bodily afflictions, thy circumstantial trials, thy matters of business, thy little things as well as thy great things; for "He is God in earth." "The Lord your God is God in earth beneath." Oh! I had saved myself a thousand sorrows if I had always lived upon this principle. I had saved myself a thousand woes, if I had lived as if there was "a God on earth." (*J. Irons.*) **Bind this line of scarlet thread in the window.**—*The scarlet line:*—In Scripture we find the blessing of God and the curse of God concentrated not only in individual souls, but also in cities. Thus Jerusalem is constantly set forth in Scripture as the city of blessing (Psa. xlviii. 1-3, l. 2). On the other hand, Jericho is the city of the curse (chap. vi. 17). These two cities, then, are evidently representative cities. Jerusalem, the city of blessing, represents the Church of God, destined to eternal life. Jericho, the city of the curse, represents the world, alienated from God, and destined to destruction. And then what will Rahab represent but those who are gathered out of the one into the other, not on account of anything good in themselves, any natural excellencies or attainments, but by the grace of God, and according to His good pleasure. And specially does she, herself a Gentile, seem to represent those of the Gentiles who are brought to God. Rahab's faith showed itself in this, that she recognised God. She looked above second causes. It was not Israel's power and prowess, but God's hand, which she saw (vers. 9-11). All this throws much light on the nature of true faith. It shows us, first, that living faith carries us straight to God. Our hearts are very prone to get entangled in second causes—to look at the hand of man, and forget the hand of God. The language of faith is, "It is the Lord." It elevates the heart above second causes, and enables it to rest, not, it may be, without many struggles, on the will and arm

of God. Again, we see in this history that faith is the principle of a new life. Rahab's life had been an unhallowed one, and she had sunk lower than many others in Jericho. But now through Divine grace she rises higher than all (Heb. xi. 51). And faith is always the same; the same in its object, which is God; the same in its principle, which is His grace; the same in its result, which is holiness of life. Rahab believed in the approaching doom of Jericho; she felt that its days were numbered. The true Christian now believes that a more awful and universal judgment is coming upon the world, and he flees from the wrath to come—flees to the only Refuge from the storm. But Rahab went further. She wished to have some assurance that her life, and the life of her family, would be spared. It is not wonderful that she should have desired this token; and we may well imagine what comfort she must have felt when the scarlet line was floating in the air at her window. Very solemn thoughts must often have weighed upon her heart—thoughts of the awful destruction which awaited her fellow-townsmen; but she felt no anxiety about herself and family. The scarlet line silenced every fear. And if it was natural in Rahab to desire a token of her safety, is it not even more natural in the true Christian to desire it? And one there is which is granted sooner or later to those who walk with God. It is not always given at once; often it grows up by degrees. But yet, sooner or later, it is given. The blood of Jesus secures pardon, and also produces assurance. But notice that there is a wide difference between the two. Forgiveness is one thing; the knowledge of forgiveness is another. Forgiveness of sin we must have, to be Christians. Assurance is a privilege which Christians should seek, and seek until they find, and then watch, that they may retain it. If, then, you would have the scarlet line floating at the window of your hearts, you must trust simply in Christ. This of itself is enough to bring, and does often bring, assurance; but if not, endeavour to walk with God. Be diligent in doing His will and work, and perhaps God will meet you then, and will crown some act of faith and self-denial and devoted service with a true token, a scarlet line of His assurance-love. Having proceeded thus far with the history of Rahab, we must say a few words about its conclusion. What a difference that little piece of scarlet line made! It was not a mere token arranged between man and man; it was sanctioned in heaven. God's eye as well as man's was fixed upon the scarlet line, and Rahab was protected. And if that scarlet line made so great a difference in her case, and secured her protection, oh, how much more shall the blood of Christ secure that of the true Christian! Is it sprinkled upon your heart? Does God's eye see it there? Then all your sins, however many, are forgiven; all your enemies, however strong, will be overcome. But there is still one other point to be noticed in Rahab's history. You will find it stated in chap. vi. 55, where it says, "She dwelleth in Israel unto this day." So that from that time forth, though she had been a sinner of the Gentiles, she was put among God's children, reckoned as one of His own Israel; and even, we learn from Matt. i. 5, so honoured of God as to be one of the line from whom Jesus was descended. And do we not learn from this how completely the blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin? how real a thing is the forgiveness of sins? how great and entire is the change which the grace of God makes in the heart? (*G. Wagner.*) *Rahab saved:*—I. THE SOVEREIGN MERCY OF GOD WAS MAGNIFIED IN THE PREVIOUS CHARACTER AND POSITION OF THE INDIVIDUAL TO WHOM IT WAS VOUCHSAFED. II. THE ONENESS, THE PRIMEVAL, CONSTANT, AND CONTINUED IDENTITY OF THE WAY OF SALVATION, from the blood that flowed upon Abel's altar, and I doubt not upon Adam's also, to "the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel." By that line—as with Rahab, so with the Church—the messengers that brought it to her and taught it to her had already escaped; it had borne their weight, proved its efficacy; and the Church knows it to be strong enough still. She knows it to be the cable-line which rivets her to the anchor of hope, "sure and steadfast, which entereth into that within the veil." Ah! who that has ever tried it, who that has ever "fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before him," hath not found the promise fulfilled in his happy experience—"I will draw them with the cords of love, with the bands of a man"! Blessed Jesus! Thou art this "scarlet line," dyed with the blood of propitiating mercy. III. ANOTHER EXEMPLARY FEATURE IN THE ACT OF RAHAB'S FAITH IS ITS GREAT SIMPLICITY. What could be simpler than tying a scarlet line in a window? Had the gospel assumed a more scientific and imposing form—had its principles been more elaborate and philosophical—had it required years of study to comprehend it, and thereby attached some literary reputation to the ultimate adept in it—had it been like the rabinnical lore of the

Hebrews, or the mythological mysteries of the Greeks, beyond the reach of the vulgar, and a consequent badge of distinction to the initiated—had its prophet required us to do some great thing—were its peculiar privileges obtainable only by the pomp of a ritual, the costliness of sacrifice, or the toil of pilgrimage—then the evangelical Sion had never been destitute of its thousands of devotees and ten thousands of disciples; but when it appears in the guise of a system of which a child can appreciate the beauty, and which only requires the spirit of a child to learn and entertain it—when "the wayfaring man," as he runs upon his business, may read it—when its elastic principles expand their comprehensive arms to the embrace of all men, and like the outstretched arms of its crucified Author upon the Cross seem to offer mercy on the right hand and on the left—when its whole system is summed up in a single sentence, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved"—then the world turns its back upon the Church, is ashamed of the fellowship of children and vulgar and illiterate people, the simplicity of the truth is mistaken for vulgarity, and the house of God is eschewed and avoided, because, instead of the sumptuous drapery and tinselled garniture of the noble, the poetical, the dramatic, the speculative, and the vain, its only ornament and ensign is the Cross of Christ—its sole phylactery is "the scarlet line in the window." IV. RAHAB'S ACT OF FAITH EXTENDED A BLESSING, AS EVERY ACT OF FAITH DOES, TO THE WHOLE FAMILY. She gathered her father and mother and brethren and all her kindred into her house; and the emblem in the window spared them all. Yet I suppose it will scarcely be contended that it was the bit of thread that saved them, rather than the covenant of which that thread was the sign. But just as idle is the theory that the sacrament is salvation, instead of the sign of the Saviour; as inaccurate is the impression that faith itself saves, and not His blood and righteousness which faith appropriates. Why, there is no more saving merit in faith than there is in works—not a jct. I am not saved because I believe, but I am saved by Him in whom I believe. There is all the world's difference between those propositions. (*J. B. Owen, M.A.*)

CHAPTER III.

VER. 1. **Joshua rose early in the morning.**—*Early rising:*—Why does Joshua rise early in the morning? He has important and responsible duties to discharge during the day, and this may be one reason. Perhaps this has been his habit during a long succession of years, and now it is as easy and natural to him as breathing. Much has been said by some in favour of early rising, and it has been the practice of many distinguished men. Franklin wrote these words, "The morning has gold in its mouth." Dean Swift declared that "he never knew any man come to greatness and eminence who lay in bed of a morning." Doddridge, Barnes, Wesley, Judge Hale, and others we could name, always rose before five o'clock in the morning. As we look upon these sayings, and consider these examples, should we affirm that early rising is the imperative duty of every man? There are certain persons who live to do evil, only evil, and that continually. The longer they remain in bed the better it will be for themselves and others. There are some who live a life of sheer indolence. Since their sleeping and waking hours are equal, so far as others are concerned, it is of no importance when they rise. In these times, too, when day is turned into night, there are multitudes, especially in our large cities and towns, who cannot go to rest till a late hour, and to whom early rising is therefore a physical impossibility. Besides, no hard and fast line can be drawn regarding measures of sleep, because some require more than others. We believe it would be highly beneficial to the bodies, the minds, and the souls of all, if the old custom—"early to bed and early to rise"—were constantly observed. Let every individual, however, endeavour to discharge every duty which is legitimately imposed upon him; and whether this is done by day or by night, he will fill up the outline of work which God gives to him, and find acceptance in His sight. (*A. McAuslane.*) **They removed from Shittim, and came to Jordan.**—"*Advance*" is the strong word that gathers up the teaching of the chapter. 1. The advance was from a notable past. "Finis" had been written to the first volume of the history of Israel; bondage its preface, vengeance its introduction,

mercy its continual illumination. Sin had made their forty years a wilderness, in which they wandered from one oasis to another of heavenly grace set as with palm-trees and wells of water. And the present was rich and satisfying. Eastern Palestine was overflowing with honey and oil and milk. The stately oaks of Bashan, its sheep and goats and mighty bulls waiting to be herded among their riches, its abundant pasturage and countless watercourses, quite outrivaled the land beyond the river. Here they were already in possession; while beyond, fenced cities and disciplined troops forewarned of hardship and blood. This new volume opened to-day will show no such lavishness of miraculous helps. Still the word is "Advance." If the leader is less, the people are more. If miracles and interventions are fewer, courage and skill and power are greater. God's helps are transferred from without to within the hearts of men. He works best for them by working through them. 2. The advance was a long step toward their destiny. God's purposes never turn back. His plan demanded the transfer of the people across the Jordan. Just because Eastern Palestine was broader and richer, they must go over. Their national growth and mission demanded a new type of life. Israel must set his feet by the shore of the great sea, and dwell upon the roads traversed by caravans and armies. Then Alexandria can supply its spiritual philosophy, Greece its culture and language, Rome its law and wide sway, to aid in recording and extending the gospel. Physical geography is potent in civilisation. 3. Advance requires spiritual preparation. It is not first for the sake of earthly reward. An eternal purpose, a holy destiny rules the progress. Before each Jordan is crossed, the people must be sanctified, the leader empowered. The past was no dead past to bury its dead, but was to live in remembrance of deliverance granted and mercies showered, of disastrous and destructive sins. (*C. M. Southgate.*)

Vers. 2–8. **When ye see the ark . . . go after it.**—*The good superseded by the better:*—Hitherto the Israelites had been led on their way by the pillar of cloud. But now that was to be seen no more. With the death of Moses, apparently, it had disappeared. So the ark is to take the place of the pillar of cloud. It is better that there should come sometimes these changes of form—changes in the method of the Divine communication with men, or their communication with Him, though we are apt to quarrel with them, and to be greatly afraid when they seem to be impending. For our disposition is so strong to regard the means as the end, and to exalt the human or the material at the expense of the spiritual, of which it is the symbol, that we need, in order to be kept from idolatry, to have these visible things, these material props, taken from us, so that we may be led to trust more fully in the unseen, and to lean only on the eternal arm of God. In the case of the Israelites it was a higher symbol that was now to take the place of the pillar. The pillar had answered its purpose. It had served to show the people the way they should go, and to remind them of the Divine guardianship; but in itself it had no special suggestiveness. But with the ark it was otherwise. It had a sacredness in public esteem, inasmuch as it contained the tables of the testimony. It was the repository of the law. The word of the Lord was enshrined in it. And it was not of the Divine law only that it spoke. It spoke of mercy also, of clemency, of God's forgiveness; for the lid of it was the mercy-seat. So that while it was a symbol of law, it was a symbol also of hope and of peace to those who might be mourning their inadequate fulfilment of the law. It was, then, an object to be regarded with reverence, and was in danger, indeed, of being regarded, as afterwards it was in fact, with superstitious reverence. But now, in our day, the ark has gone the way of the cloudy pillar. It too has disappeared. Are we then forsaken? Have we nothing to guide us in the strange and perilous way we have to go? It is only the voice of unbelief that can answer "No." God speaks to us, not as He spoke to our fathers, or to His people in ancient days, but not less truly than He spoke to them, and by a mightier though a gentler voice, and by a symbol infinitely more rich in meaning. To us in these later days He has spoken by His Son. And what is the Son? He is the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His person. It is He who is our Guide to lead us forward in the untrodden ways. Surely the pillar and the ark, yes, and the priest also, and all the forms and ritual of the old covenant, might well vanish away, if in their place the Christ, the Son of the living God, is to come. And notice this—that, like the ark which was a type of Himself, He passes over before us into Jordan, that we who follow Him may pass through it in safety.

Into Jordan—for between us, too, and the land of our hope and our desire, there rolls a deep and, as it seems to our fears at times perhaps, an impassable stream. Men of all times have had their hopes of a better world, into which they might enter at last. And we have had our hopes. Those especially who have had weariness and disappointments to bear, like the Israelites in their wanderings in the desert, have clung to the thought of a region of peace and joy which may be their inheritance when the strife is over. But who has not had thoughts of such a future? of such a destiny? of such a home? We have much here that is sweet—many of us—much from which it would cost us not a little to part. But we have not all that we need; and in how many ways are we thwarted! Why, the very fruition of our desires serves only to make it the more keen! Surely there are better things in store—a clearer vision, a larger life, a more perfect holiness. But between that bright world which our imagination paints and us there lies the dark and deep river. Not the stream of death merely. It is sin that has made the stream so alarming. We have done wrong. And how can we meet with God, and how can we enter into that holy Presence? Well, let us look at this picture. Here is the ark of the Lord, in the centre of Jordan; and while it rests there, the people by hundreds and thousands are able to pass over to the other shore in safety. Does not that remind us of another scene? "They took Jesus," you read in one of the Gospel accounts, "and led Him away. And He, bearing His Cross, went forth unto a place called the place of a skull; and they crucified Him, and two other with Him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst." "In the midst"—the centre of all that terrible scene. What a scene it is! Death is there; and death the most shameful and agonising. And sin is there—sin the most aggravated and the most awful. But Christ has passed over before us into this deep gulf of iniquity and horror. "He bore our sins in His own body on the tree." "He tasted death for every man." But, thanks be to God, the deep waters did not overwhelm Him. He entered into the midst of them, and they rolled back and acknowledged Him their Master. It was impossible for death to hold Him. He met it, and triumphed openly over it. And there He stands in the centre of that Jordan that we dread, that we, trusting in Him and sharing in His victory and His joy and His eternal life, may pass over in safety and peace. (*H. Arnold Thomas, M.A.*) *The ark of covenant*:—I. THE LINE OF THE MARCH: "Ye have not passed this way heretofore." The way was unknown, untried, danger-encompassed. Great conflicts lay in it. Great trials; trials of faith, trials of courage, trials of patience, trials of strength. II. THE LEADER OF THE MARCH along the unknown, untried, and danger-encompassed way: "The ark of the covenant of the Lord." In other words, Jesus was the Leader of the march. He was with the Church in the wilderness—the true Joshua—the Captain of "the sacramental host of God's elect." III. THE MARCH ITSELF. 1. It was to be a prompt following—unquestioning, soldierlike. To the high summons, "Follow Me," the response was to be, "Lord, we will follow Thee, whithersoever Thou goest." 2. It was to be humble, reverent following. "Come not near unto it." The following was to be far: far, and yet near. Near because far. Far, through a perception of the greatness of God; far, through a consciousness of unworthiness. Far in that sense, and therefore near. "For thus saith the High and Lofty One," &c. 3. It was to be a trustful following. The ark of the covenant of the Lord was to stand out clear and distinct, that each and all might see it; that even the little children might see it. There was to be no crowding round the ark of the covenant of the Lord. Nothing was to intervene between the people and their guide, and the object of their trust; not even Joshua. They were to see "no man, save Jesus only." (*W. Crosbie, M.A., LL.B.*) *Difficulty*:—I. WE NEED NEW GRACE FOR NEW EXPERIENCES. Some trial which we have never before endured is to be borne by us. Some duty which we have never before discharged is to be performed by us. Some relationship that is entirely new is to be formed by us, and we know not how we shall bear ourselves. Let us take courage. He who gave these minute directions to His ancient people will not fail us; and though He may not come to us with such specific guidance, He will yet by His providence and Spirit give us the help we need. II. WHEN WE HAVE TO CROSS ANY RIVER OF DIFFICULTY, LET US PUT THE ARK OF THE COVENANT INTO THE MIDDLE OF THE STREAM. In simple phrase, when we come to a difficulty, let us see Christ in it, and then we shall be able to surmount it. He turns the water into dry land. He makes our difficulties stepping-stones to glory. We are never really in danger when we can see Him. III. THERE ARE NO DEGREES OF DIFFICULTY WITH GOD. All things are equally easy to Omnipotence. Let us not limit the Holy One of Israel by supposing that any of our

emergencies are too great for Him to help us through them. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *The influence of the ark*:—The influence of the ark upon the popular mind finds an analogy in the middle ages. A recent writer, speaking of civil life in Siena, says: "In the centre of the Republican army was the famous Carroccio, a car upon four wheels, drawn by four pairs of oxen covered to the feet in rich cloths. A horn or "antenna" rose from the centre of the car to a great height, upon which floated the standard of the Republic. . . . Lower down, about the middle of the antenna, a Christ upon the Cross, with outspread arms, seemed to bless the army. A kind of platform in the front of the car was reserved for the most valiant soldiers, told off for its defence; behind was another platform for the trumpeters and musicians. An act of religious consecration and worship was celebrated upon the car before it left the city, and white-robed priests accompanied it to the battlefield. As the Carroccio of Siena, drawn by the large mild-eyed oxen of Tuscany, wound its way through the gates and down the sloping olive-clothed hills from the city, crowds followed its course with straining eyes, from the walls and ramparts and housetops. The loss of the Carroccio was to the Republic like the loss of the ark of the Lord to the Hebrews —the greatest public calamity; and all that each city possessed of the most valorous, the nerve and flower of the army, was chosen to act as the guard of the sacred car; the fiercest of the conflict was waged around it; and its presence often decided the fate of the battle." *Crossing the border*:—It was, you observe, the putting forward of their most precious, their priceless, inheritance to the very forefront of the camp, to which the people were summoned in the crossing over Jordan. About three-quarters of a mile, throughout the march, was to separate the ark and its bearers from the body of the travelling host. Why was this? God does nothing in vain. God does nothing without reason. Let us see, then, whether it may not have been in view of another journey and a mightier multitude of travellers that Joshua forbade the children of Israel to go within two thousand cubits of the ark. I. Now it certainly does appear to require some explanation, for it is a very strange and very improbable direction, that the most valuable of all the property the people possessed, that the very emblem of their character as the people of Jehovah, should be ordered to the most exposed of all places in the expedition, the thousands who would have rallied for its defence being ordered to remain nearly a mile in the rear. You recollect how God punished the successors of these pilgrims for exposing the ark in the battlefield in the eyes of the Philistines, who seized it and carried it away. And yet here you have that same consecrated treasure borne by a handful of priests, not only in the front, where the first shock from the Canaanites is certain to be felt, but left unprotected to the mercy of the enemy by this express decree. Verily, if I may not go so far as to reckon this transaction a typical one, at all events I am unable to make anything of the wisdom or prudence of the commandment, unless I see in it a picture of what has happened, again and again, not to the symbols of our modern Christianity, but to that Christianity itself. You can hardly read this chapter without being reminded of words written when ages and generations had gone by, "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God." There may, no doubt, be a sense wherein the Church is the champion for the truth, contending earnestly for the faith. We are to wrestle against flesh and blood, and against spiritual wickedness, rather than abandon Christ's gospel to its foes. But there, nevertheless, are times when God determines to dispense with the valour even of the Church, and works the mightiest of His exploits by the unsupported majesty of the gospel itself. I see this in the whole history of Christianity, from the days of its Founder until now. The history of Christianity is not the history of men. It is the history of truth triumphing without men, and even ofttimes in spite of men; so that it has been, as if out of the mouth of babes and of sucklings, that the enemy and the avenger have been stilled, that God might have all the praise. We are Christians, not for God's security, but for our own. We were not converted as if He needed anything; we want the ark, not the ark us; and whensoever you find yourself tempted, in prosperous times, to boast of the Church as if she prospered through you, or whensoever, in adverse times, you find yourselves lamenting over a dead soldier of the Cross, "My father! my father! the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof," then remember that in that day, when all the godliness the world knew had laid up its symbols in the ark of the covenant, that ark, all alone, cleft in twain the waters of a river, and put to flight the armies of the alien, giving protection to thousands but receiving none. II. But now, this is not, you will observe, by any means the reason that was given by Joshua himself why the camp should not come nearer to the ark. The reason given is, that the ark was to

be the guide of the travelling host, and that certain very obvious advantages would be gained by the putting of an interval betwixt the leaders and the led. "Come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go; for ye have not passed this way heretofore." The command had been given to go over the border into the country of the Canaanites, but that border was a deep and a rapid, if not a very wide, river. Had the travelling host come up all together to the banks of the Jordan there might have been hard work to muster up the courage and the faith requisite for the crossing, and so the making way for the miracle. On the other hand, let the priests, the chief men of the congregation, not only go down themselves into that perilous river, but take into it the ark of the covenant whereof they are the appointed and responsible keepers; and let the vanguard of the people not come up to that river until the precious chest, with its bearers, appears in safety in the midst of the current, and until that miraculous channel has been cut, and remains waiting for them to follow in security and comfort, and by this means you get the Israelites into Canaan without loss, and, furthermore, without risking their disobedience or rebellion. I will not insist on the merely abstract position that there is a fitness in putting a guide at some distance from the guided in matters so lofty as religion; that you quicken the reverence of those who follow or obey when you put some interval, whether of nature or of time, betwixt the leaders and the led. This, indeed, might be illustrated by the crossing of the river with two thousand cubits between the ark and the congregation. "Come not near it." Follow it, but treat it with respect. Jesus, in a sense, still commands us, "Touch Me not." Our entire business consists in this—"If any man will be My disciple, let him take up his cross and follow Me." "He left us an example that we should follow His steps." Whereas it surely needs not that we urge it, as the cardinal defect in the piety of most of us, that we forget the cubits which will ever separate the disciple from the Master, the servant from his Lord. Recollect that it was when Iscariot came near enough, nearer than they all, to kiss the Saviour, that he sold Him to His enemies for "thirty pieces of silver." Therefore, as to the ark which hides from you and from your children the things which belong only to the Lord our God, follow it, but "come not near it, that ye may know the way by which ye ought to go." But, as we just now observed, this also is, though very instructive, wide of the mark. There was not merely a lesson on the ark's independence, not merely another lesson on the duty of reverence on the side of the Church, the chief thing was that the ark became a better guide by moving on in front, a thousand yards before the children of Israel. It must surely have struck you, again and again, that, however hard it is for us to live a life of faith eighteen hundred years after the Founder of our faith left the world, it must have been very much harder for those to live it who preceded the Saviour into the world. We speak not of the difference, though that is a great one, between the trusting to a past and an only future Redeemer; we refer rather to the fact that Old Testament Christians had no model, no pattern, by which to be strengthened and guided in their sojourn through the wilderness. Prophets might believe that Messiah would one day die; but prophets could scarcely know how Messiah before dying would live. Well might they "search what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when they testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ." Well they might. That was no mere curiosity. It was because they too had sufferings to endure, and knew well enough how much easier the bearing of them would be if they could bear them within sight of Immanuel's. Now, that is just what we can do. Eighteen centuries, like the two thousand cubits of the Hebrews, divide us in the rear from the living, moving man Christ Jesus, who, before tasting death for every man, tasted all the woes and the wants of life. The four Gospels are the eyes with which we keep Him in view who has gone on in front to mark out our way. If I exult in anything about the writings of the Evangelists, it is in this—that they contain my Master's anticipation of my little walk of faith. There lives not the believer of whose life there was not a rehearsal in Immanuel's. Not, perhaps, in the minuteness and exactness of its detail, but in character and in spirit. I can come into no strait out of which I may not be helped by some strait of my Master's. I can bear no burden which some burden of His will not help me to carry. Our enemies are the same—not that I have the Pharisees, or that He had Englishmen, to confound, but that the spirits of both are alike, and the weapons that must conquer both common to my Master and to me. The gist of this consolation is not that Christ bore what I have to bear: it is that He got through it all, that it did not destroy Him, that He is alive on the other side, and, which is better than all, has left that channel which His faith cut

wide open for me, that I, like my Lord, may go through that same Jordan on dry ground. That is the point: I am not with Christ in the middle of the river. For then how do I know that the waves will not engulf both the Master and the servant? But I see Him, mark you—just as the Hebrews beheld their priests—going down to every one of my sorrows. I see that faith piles up the waves in walls on either hand, and now before I have to touch that water I can catch the beautiful spectacle of that triumphant Forerunner awaiting me on the opposite bank, or else standing unhurt in the midst of the billows; and, having Himself "overcome the sharpness of death," has also "opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers." (*H. Christopherson.*)

Yet there shall be a space between you and it.—*Divine guidance not to be obscured:*—Some have thought that this was designed as a token of reverence; but in that case it would have been prescribed long before, as soon as the ark was constructed, and began to be carried with the host through the wilderness. The intention was, "that ye may know the way by which you must go" (ver. 4). If this arrangement had not been made, the course of the ark through the flat plains of the Jordan would not have been visible to the mass of the host, but only to those in the immediate neighbourhood, and the people would have been liable to straggle and fall into confusion, if not to diverge altogether. In all cases, when we are looking out for Divine guidance, it is of supreme importance that there be nothing in the way to obscure the object or to distort our vision. Alas, how often is this direction disregarded! How often do we allow our prejudices, or our wishes, or our worldly interests to come between us and the Divine direction we profess to desire! At some turn of our life we feel that we ought not to take a decisive step without asking guidance from above. But our own wishes bear strongly in a particular direction, and we are only too prone to conclude that God is in favour of our plan. We do not act honestly; we lay stress on all that is in favour of what we like; we think little of considerations of the opposite kind. And when we announce our decisions, if the matter concern others, we are at pains to tell them that we have made it matter of prayer. But why make it matter of prayer if we do so with prejudiced minds? It is only when our eye is single that the whole body is full of light. This clear space of two thousand cubits between the people and the ark deserves to be remembered. Let us have a like clear space morally between us and God when we go to ask His counsel, lest peradventure we not only mistake His directions, but bring disaster on ourselves and dishonour on His name. (*W. G. Blaikie, D.D.*)

Ye have not passed this way heretofore.—*The untrodden path:*—Frequently, in the course of a man's life, he is brought to a standstill before some new difficulty of which till then he has had no experience. Now at such an emergency here is the answer that is given by this ancient story: Put the ark of God in the river before you, and keep it fully in your sight, then though it be overflowing all its banks you shall go over dry shod. Let us take a few instances. There is the young person leaving the parental home and beginning independent life. The lad has known all the experiences of school, and has, perhaps, also made trial of business duties, while yet his evenings and mornings have been spent in the loved society of the family circle; but now he is to go forth a stranger to an unknown city, mayhap even to cross the ocean to a foreign land. Keep the ark clearly before you, young man, and you have nothing to fear. The mariner who can use his quadrant can always tell where he is if he can but get a glimpse of the sun at noonday; and you may always know your way if you keep unclouded before your faith-eye the Sun of Righteousness. We may further apply this principle to the young woman, on the day when she leaves her father's house to be the centre of the home circle of another. What hopes have gravitated towards that day! what preparations have been made for it! what congratulations have been uttered regarding it! Yet now that it has dawned there is, at her heart, a fluttering of strange anxiety. It is not that she has any, the slightest, element of distrust in him with whom she has linked her lot, but rather that she distrusts herself, and is questioning whether she is equal to the new duties that devolve upon her. So on the very verge of the river she seems to stand with "reluctant feet," as if she hardly dared to cross. Let her put the ark in the river and keep that in sight, and all will be well. Let her resolutely look to Jesus as her Saviour and sovereign, and the duties of her new life will become easy. The principle on which I am now insisting is also admirably appropriate to the case of those who find themselves face to face with a difficult duty such as has never before confronted them. In general every man's life, after he has fairly set out upon its labours, has what we might call an "even tenor." There is an ordinary routine of work to be done. But now and then this tranquillity

is interrupted. Something comes that he has not forecast. He is distrustful of himself in the matter. He knows not what to do. Now here again our practical maxim becomes valuable. Send the ark before you and keep it in sight. Remember Jesus and His atoning death. Open your heart for the reception of the Holy Spirit, and then you will be guided as safely through your difficulty as were the tribes through the swollen river. Not for spiritual difficulties alone, not for religious duties merely, as men too commonly use these words, does our maxim hold. To the Christian every difficulty is a spiritual difficulty, and every duty is a religious duty, and so in every emergency he is warranted to look to Christ; nay, he is guilty of a sin not more against God than against himself, if he does not. The ark is as much in its proper place in the counting-house as in the family or in the Church; and if in your business perplexities you had more recourse to Jesus directly and immediately, without letting any intervening human element come in to hide Him from your thoughts, you would more frequently have deliverances to tell of, and would find yourselves singing "new Ebenezers" to His praise. Depend upon it, you will not soon lose yourselves if you keep Him in view. Some years ago a party of travellers were passing over one of the Swiss mountains. After they had gone a considerable way it began to snow heavily, and the oldest of the guides gravely shook his head, and said, "If the wind rises we are lost." Scarcely had he spoken when a gale arose, and the snow was whirled into multitudinous drifts, and all waymarks were obliterated. Cautiously they moved on, not knowing where they were, and almost giving themselves up for lost. At length one of the guides, who had gone a short way before them to search out the path, was heard shouting, "The cross! The cross! We are all right." And what had the cross to do with it? It was one of those religious memorials which we so frequently meet in Roman Catholic countries, and this one, set up at first by some private individual for a personal reason, had become at length a well-known and easily recognised landmark for the traveller. Hence the moment the guide saw it he knew where he was, and what direction to take. But what was true of that symbol in their case is true in all instances of the thing which it signifies; for we may always know where we are when, with our faith-eye, we can see Christ crucified. That reveals every peril, and pierces through every disguise of evil. That bars the way to every dishonour, and barricades the entrance to every pathway of iniquity. Keep that, therefore, in uninterrupted view, and you will never lose your way. But, taking another line of remark, the maxim to which I have referred may be applied to those who are called upon for the first time to bear some heavy trial. Sorrow, in some form or other, must come upon us in the world. But the commonness of it does not make its experience a whit less bitter to those who are required to drink its cup. No matter how many others have suffered before us, our first acquaintance with grief is ever keen and poignant. I shall never forget, while memory lasts, the strangeness of the experience through which I passed when first the reaper "whose name is Death" came into my home, and "with his sickle keen" cut down, at one thrust, two of my children. The stroke blinded me for the moment, and I was like one utterly forlorn; but when at length I opened my eyes, I saw the ark in the river, and that instantly steadied me. I knew then where I was. I remembered then that He who had done it was my covenant God, to whom I had given my little ones in baptism, and since He had chosen so to accept my gift, I asked myself why I should be dismayed? From my own experience, therefore, I can attest the efficacy of this consolation, and commend it to all who are in trouble, more especially to those who have been bereaved. Let the truth symbolised by that ark be but accepted in simple faith, and even in the moment of utter desolation there will come the calmness of resignation, and the confidence which only the hope of reunion with our loved ones can impart. This alone can avail us at such a time. This leads me naturally to remark that the maxim which I have been illustrating may be applied to our own death. However many we may have seen depart, the path to ourselves must be strange and untraversed. Oh, see to it that you then keep Christ in view, for He alone can then sustain you. Through death He has Himself delivered them who, through fear of death, have been all their lifetime subject to bondage. But there may be some who have never yet made Jesus their Saviour by simple trust in Him; and to them I must address one parting word. You have had many difficulties to confront in the past. You know how you failed before them. When your business went from beneath you, and you had no prop to lean upon, how dreary were you then without the Lord! When your child died, and all the world seemed to you draped in sadness, how utterly prostrate were you then in the con-

sciousness that you had no hold on Christ! When you were laid aside with serious sickness, and you thought that you should die, how was your heart filled with dread at the prospect of meeting God! Oh, let the experience of the past warn you for the future! If you failed under the lesser trials, how will you endure the greater? "None but Christ; none but Christ," said Lambert at the stake; and there is none else can be a real helper unto you, either in life or death. Put the ark before you, then, and keep it full in view. That only, but that always, will make the channel dry. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *The untrodden path and the guiding ark*:—I. THE UNTRODDEN PATH. Our march through time is like that of men in a mist, in which things loom in strangely distorted shapes, unlike their real selves, until we get close up to them, and only then do we discover them. So for us all the path is new and unknown by reason of the sudden surprises that may be sprung upon us, by reason of the sudden temptations that may start up at any moment in our course, by reason of the earthquakes that may shatter the most solid-seeming lives, by reason of the sudden calamities that may fall upon us. The sorrows that we anticipate seldom come, and those that do come are seldom anticipated. The most fatal bolts are generally from the blue. One flash, all unlooked for, is enough to blast the tree in all its leafy pride. Many of us, I have no doubt, can look back to times in our lives when, without anticipation on our part, or warning from anything outside of us, a smiting hand fell upon some of our blessings. The morning dawned upon the gourd in full vigour of growth, and in the evening it was stretched yellow and wilted upon the turf. Anything may come out of that dark cloud through which our life's course has to pass. And there are some things concerning which all that we know is that they must come. II. THE GUIDING ARK. For us a similar thing is true. Jesus Christ is the true Ark of God. For what was the ark? The symbol of the Divine presence; and Christ is the reality of the Divine presence with men. The whole content of that ark was the law of the Lord. And Jesus Christ is the embodied law of the present God. The ark was the sign that God had entered into this covenant with these people, and that they had a right to say to Him, "Thou art our God, and we are Thy people." And the same double assurance of reciprocal possession and mutual delight in possession is granted to us in and through Jesus Christ our Lord. So He becomes the guiding Ark, the Shepherd of Israel. His presence and will our directors. The law, which is contained and incorporated in Him, is that by which we are to walk. The covenant which He has established in His own blood between God and man contains in itself not only the direction for conduct, but also the motives which will impel us to walk where and as He enjoins. And so, every way we may say, by His providences which He appoints, by His example which He sets us, by His gracious Word in which He sums up all human duties in the one sweet obligation, "Follow Me," and even more by His Spirit that dwells in us, and whispers in our ears, "This is the way; walk ye in it," and enlightens every perplexity, and strengthens all feebleness, and directs our footsteps into the way of peace; that living and personal Ark of the covenant of the Lord of the whole earth is still the guide of waiting and docile hearts. III. THE WATCHFUL FOLLOWING: "Come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye ought to go." In a shipwreck the chances are that the boats will be swamped by the people scrambling into them in too great a hurry. In the Christian life most of the mistakes that people make arise from their not letting the ark go far enough ahead of them before they gather up their belongings and follow it. An impatience of the half-declared Divine will, a running before we are sent, an acting before we are quite sure that God wills us to do so and so, are at the root of most of the failures of Christian effort, and of a large number of the miseries of Christian men. If we would only have patience! Three-quarters of a mile the ark went ahead before a man lifted a foot to follow it. And there was no mistake possible then. Now do not be in a hurry to act. "Raw haste" is "half-sister to delay." We are all impatient of uncertainty, either in opinion or in conduct; but if you are not quite sure what God wants you to do, you may be quite sure that He does not at present want you to do anything. Wait till you see what He does wish you to do. Better, better far, to spend hours in silent—although people that know nothing about what we are doing may call it indolent—waiting for the clear declaration of God's will, than to hurry on paths which, after we have gone on them far enough to make it a mortification and a weariness to turn back, we shall find out to have been not His at all, but only our own mistakes as to where the ark would have us go. And that there may be this patience the one thing needful—as, indeed, it is the one thing

needful for all strength of all kinds in the Christian life—is the rigid suppression of our own wills. Suppress your own wills, dwell near God, that you may hear His lightest whisper. "I will guide thee with Mine eye." What is the use of the glance of an eye if the man for whom it is meant is half a mile off, and staring about him at everything except the eye that would guide? And that is where some of us that call ourselves Christian people are. God might look guidance at us for a week, and we should never know that He was doing it, we have so many other things to look after. And we are so far away from Him that it would need a telescope for us to see His face. "I will guide thee with Mine eye." Keep near Him, and you will not lack direction. (*A. Maclaren. D.D.*) *The untravelled and irretraceable way* (with Deut. xvii. 16):—I. OUR LIFE, LIKE ISRAEL'S JOURNEY, IS BY A NEW WAY: "Ye have not gone this way heretofore." What others have felt and done is no sure chart of what we shall do and feel. The ship just coming in cannot predict what will be the voyage of the one just starting out. Like a journey in an unfamiliar, mountainous country, every step is into a new region; strange and unexpected scenes arise. II. LIFE IS ALSO BY AN IRRETRACEABLE WAY: "Ye shall no more return that way." Like Israel, we look for the first and the last time upon the scenery as we pass through it. We may change the direction of life, correct its tendencies, find pardon for its sins and follies, but we never can retrace the steps already taken. III. OUR EXPERIENCES, LIKE THOSE OF ISRAEL, ARE FOR PURPOSES OF DISCIPLINE. There is a moral strength, patience, perseverance, and trust, gotten by the valleys we traverse, the steeps we climb, and the magnitudes we see. One day Divine wisdom will be justified in all eyes for this uneven, circuitous path of life. IV. OUR JOURNEY ALSO LEADS TO THE PROMISED LAND, AND FIDELITY WILL BRING US THERE. We are not in doubt as to whither we go, however unforeseen the way may be. Calebs and Joshuas even now bring us marvellous clusters of fruit as foretastes. We climb, here and there, Pisgahs, to be refreshed by the prospect. We are sure that when our feet touch that "darkly flowing river" it will part, and we shall easily go over. However uncertain the future, some things are sure. A few great truths, sunk deep in the heart, are all we absolutely need for the journey. God never leaves the soul without some light. As Charles Kingsley said, in the London fog: "There is always light enough to get home." (*T. S. Scott.*) *Untrodden ways*:—I. Thoughts suggestive of CONSOLATION. 1. Remember, whether your way in providence be new or old, it is not a way of your own appointing. A higher power than yours has led you to your present standing-place. It must, therefore, be right. God has never erred yet, either in guiding a star in its orbit, or in directing the chaff from the winnower's hand, and He cannot err in steering the course of one of His people. "Say ye unto the righteous it shall be well with him"; for "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and He delighteth in his way." "My times are in Thy hand." 2. Note again, your present pathway is new to you, but it is not new to your God. All things are equally present to His eye. Nothing comes upon Him by surprise. 3. Remember, also, the trials which seem new to us are not new to God's people. Joshua said to the tribes, "Ye have not passed this way heretofore"; but then their forefathers had gone through the Red Sea, which was much the same thing, and perhaps on a greater scale still. Do not, therefore, say or imagine that your woes are peculiar. Others have suffered as much as you are enduring. If it be strange to you it is only to you strange, for the rest of God's saints have suffered the same. 4. But suppose our position should be new, the labour new, the affliction new, it is no sort of reason why it should be any the more dangerous. It is folly to be alarmed at new things because they are new. There may be less danger, after all, in the trial you dread than in that which you are bearing to-day. 5. And suppose that, being new, it were dangerous; one thing is very clear, namely, that fear will not diminish the danger. To fret, and worry, and mistrust, will that prepare you for what is coming? Will it aid you to die to begin this day to "feel a thousand deaths in fearing one"? No, if the worst come to the worst, nothing can sharpen your sword so well for battle as faith in the ever-living God. 6. Hitherto and up to this moment we have found our God to be faithful to us. These present crosses which are now upon our shoulders, we say we would rather always bear them than have new crosses, but is this wise? Do you not recollect when these very crosses were themselves new? To-day's grief will only be new for to-day and for a little time to come; it will soon grow old if we live long enough, and we shall become as used to the new trial as to the old. 7. Moreover, should we become distrustful whilst passing by a way which we have never trodden before if we recollected that progress

implies a change of difficulties and trials? Who wants to be like a blind horse going round a mill for ever and ever, feeling the lash of the same whip at the same place, and dragging the same machinery round without advancing? No, let us advance. And what if in going on we meet with sterner trials? Then so let it be, for we shall receive richer grace. 8. If there come new trials, they generally end the old ones. I do not know what my trials may be seven years hence, but I do know that the trials of this month will not then disturb me. When we bow beneath the infirmities of age, we may rest assured that we shall not be annoyed by the temptations of boyhood, nor molested by the vexations of middle life. In advancing, there are prospects of gain as well as of loss. 9. Moreover, although we have not passed this way heretofore, the path runs in the right direction. The children of Israel had their faces set towards the promised land. Courage, brothers and sisters! The way may be rough to us, but it is the King's highway, leading to the New Jerusalem. II. A few sentences of DIRECTION. Wherewithal shall a man be guided when he comes to a way which he has not passed heretofore? When our way is devoid of familiar footprints, what shall we do? 1. Be most concerned to hear the word of the Lord, and obey it. Notice that this chapter seems taken up with "The Lord said unto Joshua," and "Joshua said unto the people of Israel." The chief point in every dilemma is to wait till you hear the Master's voice. 2. Distinctly recognise the presence of the covenant God of Israel with you. We never travel so sweetly over the rough ways of this life as when we see that God, the living God, the God of the covenant, the God of the mercy-seat, the God of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the God of the reconciliation by blood, is with us and fulfilling His promise, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." 3. Dismiss from your soul the anxiety which arises from the idea that you are the keeper of the Divine life within your soul. When Israel marched through the wilderness some tribes were before and some were behind the ark, as if they were guarding it; but on this occasion the ark went far ahead of them, as though God had said, "You My people are no protection to Me; I guard you." Now in the time of danger the priests who carry the ark advance into the very teeth of the enemy, and into the bed of the Jordan, and there they stand, as though the eternal God threw down the gauntlet to all the hosts of Canaan and said, "Come and contest it with Me if you can. I have left My people behind; I alone will meet you; I have come up alone, unattended, and I defy you all." God's grace will take care of him upon whom it lights. 4. As further directions let me briefly say, if you are now about to enter into a great trouble, do not hurry, make no rash haste. If the grace of God does not make us calm in the time of peril and suffering, we have some reason to question whether it is healthily operating upon our spirits at all. 5. But next, while you do not hurry, do not hesitate. Not one man of all the tribes said, "I must wait and see others cross, and know whether the road really is open." At the moment the trumpets sounded the advance they all went on, asking no questions. Be brave, also, and go straight on, though it were a river of fire instead of water. If Jehovah bids you, the way is right; hesitate not. 6. There is one direction which we must not omit, because it is put by itself for special observance—it is this, "Sanctify yourselves." Whenever we are in new trials a voice speaks out of them, saying, "Sanctify yourselves." I suppose the Israelites washed themselves with water and practised the ceremonial rights which made them clean; so the child of God should come afresh in time of trouble to the precious blood of Christ. He should also ask for grace that he may purge out the old leaven. III. A few sentences by way of exciting EXPECTATION. Before us rolls this river, full to its brim; beyond the river, contention and strife await us; let us lift up our hearts to God and trust Him, and what shall then happen? 1. Why, first, we shall discern the presence of the living God (ver. 10). Anything which gives us an opportunity to see our God is worth having. Even the light of the fiery furnace, if no other light can reveal that fourth who is like the Son of God, is a precious light. Thank God that trouble is coming, for now, as through a glass, shall you behold the glory of the Lord. 2. What next will happen then? Why, in all probability the difficulty in your way will cease to be; for while the children of Israel saw the living God, they also saw a totally new and wonderful phenomenon. God does interfere in ways which could not have been prognosticated by those who best understand the science of probabilities. God flings down the challenge every day to Satan and to sin, and says, "Here is My child; I put him in a new position to-day; see if you can overcome him now." To-morrow God will issue the same challenge, and so on to the end. Perhaps this new trouble has come

because Satan has said, "Put forth now Thine hand and touch his bone, and his flesh, and he will curse Thee to Thy face"; but God is saying, "Try him, try him," only with this view, that He may get glory by causing our weakness to overcome all the strength of hell through grace Divine. 3. Is this all that we have to expect? No, we shall see such deliverances that we shall be prepared for future trials. Sometimes a trouble, when we are marvellously brought through it, becomes a kind of stock-in-trade for us; we look back upon it when the next affliction comes, and we say, "No, I am not afraid; the God who helped me on that occasion can help me now." 4. Lastly, and this is best of all, and will please the children of God most—all that is coming to you will magnify Jesus in your eyes. Jesus is very dear to every child of God, but to the most tried He is the most precious. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The untrodden way*:—Another year is numbered with the past. To each of us it has been marked by events materially affecting us for weal or woe. A new year, richly laden with golden possibilities, is now opening before us. What may transpire during it is concealed from our present view. "Ye have not passed this way heretofore." Nor need we be dismayed by reason of this obscurity; indeed, we would not have it otherwise. All that we require in going forth to meet whatever may arise, is to realise the presence with us of the God of Israel, and to follow the pillar of cloud and of fire. Several important truths were pictured forth under the Jewish dispensation by the symbol of the ark of the covenant. 1. The recognition of the Divine presence. 2. The duty of striving after the honouring of the Divine law. 3. The privilege of communion with God through the Mediator. When the children of Israel were commanded to "go after" the ark of the covenant of the Lord, they were in fact urged, in all their future wanderings, to seek to live under a continual sense of the Divine presence, to strive to honour the Divine law, and to hold fellowship with Heaven. Even so let it be with you. Think of the eye of God as being upon your way; yea, be your spirit that which led one to say, "If Thy presence go not with me, carry me not up hence." Take the principles of God's own Word, and act upon them. Seek counsel and help from Heaven. Lift up to God "holy hands." Have a mercy-seat; some spot sacred to hallowed and refreshing communion with God. And, pursuing this course, the weeks and months of the year will pass happily along in your experience: new duties will be faithfully performed, new temptations successfully resisted; your witness to the truth will be decided in its character; strength, both for service and for suffering, will be secured; and "the beauty of the Lord your God" being thus upon you, He will "establish the work of your hands." There are two very plain reasons why it behoves us to take this course. (1) Our way in the future is unknown to us, and hence we need to be Divinely directed. The waters of doubt and uncertainty are flowing over the path we have to tread, quite obliterating it from our view. We stand to-day, looking on to the goodly land beyond, the land of light and love, of rest and peace, of beauty and blessedness, of eternal purity and uprightness, but we cannot tell by what way we are to be brought into its full possession. And the path before us being thus an unknown one, we do well to yield ourselves up to the guidance of our God; and, taking this course, we may rest assured that He will conduct us in safety, and bring us at length into the fulness of His rest. (2) The future is new to us. Events and experiences, totally different from anything we have had before, will occur to us. But, living as in God's presence, and in obedience to His will, and in fellowship with Him at His throne, arise what may, we shall be Divinely supported. (*S. D. Hillman.*) *New experiences*:—It was the impressiveness of a new experience. A ship's company who have lived together for a few weeks, growing accustomed to their shipboard life, at last draw near the land towards which they have been sailing, and it is always striking to see how a quietness and seriousness seems to come over them in the last hours before they go on shore. New things are waiting for them there. They are going to exchange the familiar for the unfamiliar; so there is little of lightness and much seriousness. And this is the way in which life keeps its solemnity. Let us look to-day at this power of unprecedented things, and try to get some idea of the true way to approach them. Apply it first of all to the changes which are coming all the time in the circumstances of our lives. If you go and stand in the midst of London, or climb to the top of the pyramids, or set yourself in the middle of a snowfield of the Alps, it is a thrilling and delightful experience. What is it that makes it so? It is that you carry your old self there. Some accidental parts of yourself you have left behind in Boston, but your essential self, with your habits and your ways of thinking, you have carried

there; and the wonder is to feel this identity of yours standing among these unfamiliar things, beaten by the waves of this strange city life, frowned on by the hoary ages, or lighted by the glory of the everlasting snows. And now let it be the going, not from Boston to Egypt, but from wealth to poverty, from poverty to wealth, from health to sickness, from sickness to health, from one business to another business, from one home to another home. Oh, when any of the changes of life draws near to you, whenever God is leading you into new circumstances, clasp with new fervour and strength the old hand which you have long been holding, but prepare to feel it send new meanings to you as it clasps your hand with a larger hold. And since you are always entering into some new life, whether it mark itself by notable outward change or not, always hold the hand of God in grateful memory of past guidance and eager readiness for new—that is, in love and in faith. It is by this same principle that we are able to picture to ourselves the natural and healthy way by which men ought to pass from one period or age of life into another. A young man's life is full of novelty. Behind him, with a river rolling between, there lies that despised land in which he was a child, bound to obey what others commanded, and not knowing enough to doubt what others said was true. What shall we say about the progress which the boy seems to have made across the gap that lies between him and his childhood? Shall we not certainly say this, that the progress is natural and healthy and good, that the gap is unnatural and bad? I think there is no better condition of the human nature to contemplate than that of a young man dealing truly and seriously with the faith of his fathers which has been implicitly his childhood's faith. He finds new questions rising which he never dreamed of. The faith which is shaping for his manhood evidently is to not be wholly the same as that in which he was trained. He is to see more of God, he is to see God differently; but the essential thing is this, that it is to be the same God whom he has been seeing, that he is still to see. It is to be an enlargement of faith as he makes it his own, not a flinging away of faith with a mere possibility of finding it again some day. This is the meaning of a boy's or a young man's confirmation. It is the gathering up of all the faith and dutiful impulse of the past that it may go before the life into the untried fields. All this applies indeed to every change from period to period of life. The poetry of all growing life consists in carrying an oldness into a newness, a past into a future, always. Take what you believe and are, and hold it in your hand with new firmness as you go forward; but as you go, holding it, look on it with continual and confident expectation to see it open into something greater and truer. I think, again, that the picture of the relation between the old and the new which is seen in our story throws light upon the true method and spirit of all change in religious opinions. Men and women do go on, led by God, step by step, until they come where what has seemed to them to be true seems to them to be true no longer, and something which they once disbelieved has opened to them its soul of truth. Another spiritual prospect opens to them which they never saw before. God is different; the Bible is very different; Christ is profoundly different; and their own natures reveal to them sights which are all strange and unexpected. There is no sense of newness and inexperience in the world like that. No change of outward circumstances can for a moment match it. "You have not passed this way before" seems to be rung into the soul's ears out of every new application of the new-learnt truth to everything. And then, just then, when all seems new, and we are bewildered and exalted with the opening spiritual prospect, then is the time to call up the ark of God, which may have fallen in the rear, and to set it clearly in the front. Then, when you are going forth into regions of spiritual thought that are new to you, then you need to put all the honesty and purity and unselfishness of your nature in the van of your life; then you need to review and renew your old covenant with God; then you want to have all your earnestness, all your sense of the value of truth, refreshed in you. The principle which we have been studying seems to furnish again the law of all more distinctly spiritual life and progress. It furnishes the law of the conversion-time, for there the new and old unite; we pass on into the new under the guidance and assurance of the old. If you want to make a man a Christian, how shall you begin? You will bid him open his ears and hear the voice of a Saviour who has been always pleading. You will call up, out of the past, signs of God's love which he has never seen, but which have been always there. You will set those signs of a love which has always been at the head of the progress which is yet to be. You will say, "I beseech you therefore, brother, by the mercies of God, that you present your body a living

sacrifice to Him." And so, as the host of the Israelites stopped by the Jordan's bank before they crossed, until the old ark of the desert had swept through their ranks and taken its true place at their head, the believer's new conviction and hope waits on the brink of the new life till the mercies of the past have swept on to the front, and stand ready to lead into the yet untrodden fields of God. All this does not apply only to the one critical experience of the spiritual life which we call conversion; it is true of all spiritual progress. Never let your Christian life disown its past. Let every new and higher consecration and enjoyment into which you enter be made real to you by bringing into it all that Christ has already trained within you of grace and knowledge. To the soul which dares believe the vast and precious truth of God's personal love, all life becomes significant, and no past is so dreary that out of it there will not come up some ark of God to lead us to the richer things beyond. I pass to one more application of our principle. It concerns our thoughts about the new life which awaits the soul in heaven. We think of the strangeness of that life into which they pass who have done with all the old familiar things of earth. Once, only once, for every man it comes. "We have not passed this way heretofore," men are saying to themselves, as they begin to feel their path slope downward to the grave. It is that consciousness which we see coming in their faces when they know that they must die. And beyond death lies the unknown world. "No man hath seen God at any time," said Jesus; but there the power of the new life is to be that "we shall see Him as He is." The highest, truest thought of heaven which man can have is of the full completion of those processes whose beginning he has witnessed here, their completion into degrees of perfectness as yet inconceivable, but still one in kind with what he is aware of now. Having this thought of heaven, all the deepest life of this world is leading the man towards it. When he goes in there at last, it will be his old life with God that leads him. It will be his long desire to see God which at last introduces him to the sight of God. It will be his long struggle with sin which finally prepares him for the world where he can never sin. The powers and affections which are training in your family, your business, and your Church, are to find their eternal occupation along the streets of gold. And so the long life of heaven shall be bound to the short life of earth for ever. (*Bp. Phillips Brooks.*) *Never this way before*:—1. "Ye have not passed this way heretofore." Then it does now seem likely that the good Lord expects to give us one more chance. We are always entering upon new periods of time. Anniversary days mark the recurrence of events and afford opportunities for reflection. Birthdays and death days are full of meaning. What we ought to remember is the undoubted fact that in this twelvemonth to come we shall find ourselves travelling over pretty much the same route we went last year. There will not be anything extraordinarily surprising. Differences will be in the details. 2. "Ye have not passed this way heretofore." Then, in the fresh chance God is giving, He offers Himself to be our helper and friend. Time, time—unused, unexhausted, and unknown—sweeps about our poor little seven decades of living, and will keep its course resistlessly on after the end is reached, just as it ran its course before we were born into its beginning. Thus all the songs we sing, the wails we utter, and the prayers we make must choose expression somewhere among the combinations of seventy years allotted to each creature, and they have but one chance at a time. We are marched up according to programme, and play our tune, like so many performers in a concert given in the presence of God. During this year the concert will be repeated. The programme remains in good measure unchanged. We failed last year. The chances of life are open again. God offers to help us along. Our parts are to be played over. Will we accept a teacher this time, or not? 3. "Ye have not passed this way heretofore." Then, surely, the gifts of God's love on ahead of us have not been appropriated by others nor exhausted by ourselves. There comes a day in which any one can afford to be honestly simple and unaffected in all his surroundings, and relinquish this folly of labouring to keep up appearances for mere show. More pitiful folly still is that which jealousy engenders; for the man has ingeniously wasted his time in distancing others, who, when distanced, are dead. He has triumphed, but nobody is in the grand procession which he had imagined would immediately be formed in his honour. It makes a poor show to have no king dragging on behind the chariot. 4. "Ye have not passed this way heretofore," but it is well to remember that the ark has not passed this way heretofore either. It is significant here to notice that these people were told to accept God's guidance implicitly. The first time they had essayed to enter Canaan, their own folly had

hindered. Now they were to be led by the sign of God's unfailing love. Herein is instruction for wise men along the ages. It makes life a new thing to put the ark on before it. God's purpose, infolded in a human life, renders the life immortal. "The Christian cannot die before his time"; that time God fixes. 5. "Ye have not passed this way heretofore." Now, with the ark on ahead, the joy of the Lord is your strength. Once, I remember, I picked up a small bird which had fallen on the pavement by my feet. I sought to reinstate it among the branches overhead; but the creature could not appreciate my generosity, and with passionate eagerness struggled to escape. I began unconsciously to talk aloud to it, "Poor, silly thing; why do you not trust your best friend? All I want is to get you up again in the fork of the tree. You are making it harder for me by dashing so against my fingers; for I am obliged to hold you firmly, and you do all the hurting yourself." Why is it we all struggle so, when the Lord is giving us help? We enter upon untrodden paths, but the skies are bright, and heaven is nearer, and the good God is overhead. It is likely most of us will recall the story of Longfellow in his romance. Paul Fleming entered that little chapel of Saint Gilgen. On the tomb above his head was the inscription, "Look not mournfully into the past, it comes not back again. Wisely improve the present, it is thine. Go forth to meet the shadowy future without fear and with a manly heart." It was as if a voice came into his ear from the dead, and the anguish of his thoughts was still. (*C. S. Robinson, D.D.*) *The new year and the new way:*— 1. We begin the new year with anticipations, wondering what it hides in its hands for us. The limitations of human ignorance are most humiliating. We can tell where a comet will be in a thousand years, but not where we shall be to-morrow. We have plans, projects, purposes, but who knows aught of fulfilment, realisation, certainty? The providence of God is ever putting pressure upon us—the pressure of necessity, or that of desire and inclination, to go out and go on; but it is very much in the dark we have to go. To God the Lord belong the ongoings of life and the issues of death. The unknown journey ends in the darkening way of death. 2. The mystery of life is thus suggested by the text; it also teaches its newness. How many things are going to happen which never happened to us before! Old thoughts, eternal purposes of God, are ripening for us; and God never repeats Himself. Thus circumstanced, what charm, what spell will you take to your heart to bear you on and through to safety and home? Do you not need—I. THE LIVING PRESENCE? Amid a changing world there is a changeless God. Standing where we do, at the entrance to a new way, "we are like those who, waiting a new arrival, go out to the gate to look for one who is coming—to listen for a footfall." We feel there is One, without whom life could hardly be life, or bring content. II. GUIDANCE. A guide knows and directs. He knoweth the way we take. The word means, not mere acquaintance with, but anxiety concerning; careful observation; to trouble one's self about the matter. It is thus God knows. He concerns Himself about our way through life. III. MERCIES. God knows all needs, and He provides. He will not leave nor forsake thee until He hath done that which He hath spoken to thee of. Bread shall be given—water shall be sure. Enough, by care and patient thrift, for living, for reasonable desires, for all; more for some. But unfailing mercies for every day, for always, for all. And this because "having loved His own who are in the world, He loves them to the end." (*W. H. Davison.*) *Religious help in new circumstances:*—It is very wonderful how the element of novelty seems to penetrate our whole life, so that though we are surrounded by the old conditions we are always about to do something new. The things which we do may be like one another in certain broad features, yet they may be contradistinguished by fine lines of difference so minute and delicate as to be seen only by the closest attention. In the discrimination and right estimate of such lines lies the difference between a life that is lived roughly and a life that is finely balanced and critically calculated and arranged in every detail and bearing. 1. "Ye have not passed this way heretofore," therefore do not go until you be assured of the Divine presence and protection. What is the way? Is it a new year? Will you encounter unknown time in your own strength? Is it a new enterprise? Dare you challenge the secret resources of fortune without any help but your own? Is it a new discipline? It may destroy you if you have not bread to eat that the world knoweth not of. The great historical fact upon which you have to rest is that God has been with His people in every possible variety of circumstances, and that His love never changes (Exod. iii. 12; Josh. i. 5; Prov. iii. 5–6; Psa. xxxvii. 5; Isa. xxx. 21). 2. "Ye have not passed this way heretofore"; it is

quite right, consequently, to take new ways and untried paths in life. (1) Socially. New companionships, new alliances, new partnerships; opening up our friendly, conjugal, and commercial life. (2) Nationally. New compacts, new wars, new laws. We are bound by every consideration arising out of stewardship and responsibility to try new. 3. "Ye have not passed this way heretofore"; there are some particulars in which this must be true even of the least eventful life. (1) Is it an uneventful thing for a young man to leave his home that he may try to make his way in the world? "Ye have not passed this way heretofore." What a world it is! "Full of temptations and hidden snares," &c. (2) Is it an uneventful thing for a man to die? What is beyond? How do we become prepared for the world unseen? Is that world more sharply divided than this; for here the wicked have some enjoyments, and the righteous many pains? Is it true that in this world we really make the next? This is a journey we must all take; we may take it blindly, we may rush upon it madly, or we may so live as to become enabled to say, "Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit." 4. "Ye have not passed this way heretofore"—the suggestion is not human, but Divine; it is God Himself that proposes to guide and defend the lives of men. Before we pray, He answers! Consider how true it is that all the great proposals which have made our life richer and better have come from God, and in no degree from our own poor wit or genius. "It is not good for the man to be alone"—that is one. "Ye have not passed this way heretofore"—that is another. "Come now, let us reason together"—that is a third. And so on throughout all our life. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

The unknown year and the untrodden way:—We are entering now on a new year, and going up into new time territory. "We have not passed this way heretofore." And it becomes us to be more than usually solicitous to know the way by which we are led, and the whole will of God concerning us in the leading. It may be well, however, to take heed that an unprofitable curiosity does not usurp the place of a wholesome solicitude. It is as true now as it was when our Lord spoke the words, that "times and seasons," eras and epochs, are put in God's own power. Enough is revealed for the direction of practical conduct. Enough is conceded for the nourishment of childlike faith. We feel, then, as we stand on the margin of the year, at the portal of its days, that there can be no rehearsal in our knowledge of its coming events, either those of public importance or those of our individual lives. We know not what it is to bring forth; but we know well that it will bring forth something, and that that something will in all probability be important. When we know the parents, we can guess what the children will be. This year is the child of all the years, and especially of the last years that have sped. "We have not passed this way heretofore." The vista of the bygone years was never so long as it is to-day. Time never carried such a burden of events on his shoulders. History never held in her bosom so many mysteries not yet solved, so many explanations not yet given, so many germs for future flowering. God has never had so much on hand in the earth. In such a time, with what emphasis come the Saviour's words to us: "Watch: what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch"! "We have not passed this way heretofore." We may be going to pass a Jordan of our own in more respects than one. Nothing is more certain than that we are now in the very process of a great social revolution, affecting not merely this or that separate sphere or relation in human affairs, but touching the very basis of society, and all the laws under which men live. That we need a revival is certain. It is equally certain that we may have it for the asking. No doubt many are asking for it, unknown to us; and the thing asked for (God grant it) may be on its way! But we discontinue this strain of supposition, again reminding you that this year we are not far from Jordan, and that, in more senses than one, we may soon be crossing it. We are somewhere in the great army which is marching onwards, and not only ought we to be conscious of our own progress, but wisely observant of the changes that are going on around us. The times themselves are "put in God's own power." The "signs" of the times are held out for our instruction, that we may, in a measure, know what God is doing and what we ourselves ought to do. But it will be well to make a much narrower and more personal application of this principle. We, as individuals, we, as we now are, have not passed by any way at all. We have been journeying for years, but always changing; so that now, while the same in personal identity, we are yet morally and circumstantially different. Our letters come under the same address, but they are opened and read by men not quite the same. We have not sub-let our house, and yet the occupant is different. It is a strange, subtle process of change which is thus going on; but it is as certain

and as resistless as the flow of time itself. Keeping, then, in view these two things—the outward and the inward change—both of which are sure to go on during the coming year, I would venture to utter some appropriate watchwords for the year—"notes" of the life we must aim to live as the days go by. 1. Vigilance. Have the senses well exercised and ready for quick and true discernment of men and things. Without something of this sleepless vigilance, without the "inevitable eye," we shall lose much of what is in the year, and in the year for us. We are travellers. But the time that carries us forward is not like an old stage-coach that goes lumbering along the same road by which it has run for many years, the passengers by which can tell exactly what objects and scenes lie along the line and will come into sight at a particular part of the road and time of the day. We ascend the chariot of the year, and it rolls where never chariot-wheels have left mark before, where scenes which have never been revealed to man or angel, or the actual sight of God, will unfold themselves. No one can tell how much we may miss by being asleep or only half-awake. 2. Promptitude. We watch for occasions, that we may seize them; for opportunities, that we may improve them; for friendly influences, that we may yield to them; for adverse powers, that we may resist them; for the morning, that we may answer "girded!" to its labour-call; for the evening, that we may enter within the shadow of its rest; for temptation, that we may vanquish or flee from it; for privilege, that we may embrace it; for the hour of prayer, that we may pray; for God in His manifold revealings and comings to us, that we may receive Him as our God, and that we may give ourselves to Him more than "heretofore." 3. Courage will often be needed to do what the hand finds to do. The possession and cultivation of moral courage, therefore, is another very necessary preparation for this way that we have not passed heretofore. We know not what any day of the year may bring forth; but we know, just as well as we know that the days are coming, that, if we live to pass through them, we shall need to be morally brave, or fail. We know that the craven spirit, with which, alas! we are so ready to purchase a momentary ease, will cover us with shame, and bring defeat and dishonour quickly after us as pursuers, and that boldness and confidence will carry us through. 4. Gentleness is a good word to put under the shelter of courage, and a good thing to put among the preparations for the unknown year. We are not really fitted, in the fullest sense, for the journey of a year, unless we are full of tenderness, unless we are full of tears. The children will be around us wherever we are; for, like the daisies, like the sparrows, they are everywhere. The young will be rising into manhood and womanhood, and some of them will be looking Zionwards and sensitively watching to see if there be any who understand their look, so as to look back and help and welcome them. The sick will be suffering through their weary days and nights; and the poor will be struggling; and those who have seen better days will be coming down the hill in our sight, bearing themselves with dignity as in the former time, although now the wardrobe is but poorly filled, and the table scantily spread; and the sensitive will be shrinking, and the miserable will be praying; the hopeless wondering if any help will come to them. What a world to live in! and what need for a pitiful gentleness! Walk softly, then, and have a care! 5. We should be poorly furnished for the way we have not been heretofore, without filial confidence, which will easily, when occasion comes, pass into resignation. There will be much to try faith and patience, and love and loyalty. God knows all; there is but one way for us—to trust Him with a deep, filial trust, with a love that will cast out all fear, and to resign ourselves utterly, and in everything, to His most holy will. 6. For, whatever comes, there will always be, not only need and occasion, but ground and reason, for serene, invincible hopefulness. Good is better and stronger than evil. Greater is the world above than the world below! Greater is life than death. Greater is this year than any of its predecessors (whatever may be its particular events), as being nearer the end, when "life and immortality," in the heavenly sense, shall "be brought to light." (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *The untrodden and unknown way:*—We may speculate and conjecture about what is to befall us, or to befall the Church and the world in the course of this year; but the sagacity of the wisest statesmen cannot forecast the events of the near future. Neither can the knowledge of the most learned inform us what shall be on the morrow. This is a thought that may humble our intellectual pride, and may prevent us from being puffed up by the little knowledge to which we have attained. But we are not in absolute ignorance of what will probably be the nature and character of some of the events of the future. We know that as the present leaves us the future will find us. We enter into this year with the

character, principles, and habits that marked our life in the past. Life is a continuous thing. Character becomes a continuous thing. Old things have not passed away from us with the old year, and all things have not, with the new year, become new to us. This is a solemn and an awful thought, because it indicates to us that not only do we enter on the new year with the character and principles of the past year, and that if we enter on the year without the love of God in our hearts, we cannot be happy, but it also indicates to us that as we pass from the days of time so shall we enter on the ever-revolving and endless ages of eternity. Let us give due consideration to this thought, and it may, through the grace of God, by destroying a most prevalent and fatal delusion—the delusion by which multitudes deceive and ruin their souls, that somehow or other to-morrow, or at least the time of death, will work a grand transformation of their state and character—awaken us now, in the precious passing present, to give heed to the things of our peace, that they may not at length be hid from our eyes. The statement, "Ye have not passed this way heretofore," is not inconsistent with our knowledge thus far of the future that it will, to a great extent, take its colour, complexion, and character from the present. The connection between years as measurements of men's lives is not that merely of antecedence and succession. It is more. It is a connection as between cause and consequence or effect, as between seed and fruit. Time, that develops the germ in the acorn into the stately oak; time, that developeth tares from their seeds, will gradually evolve what are the seeds from which our words and actions grow. The tree of character will be known by its fruits. But from the moral connection between past, present, and future, as related to our lives and characters, not only will the future be a developing time, but it will also be, because of this, a time of reaping, a sort of harvest time. If in the past year we have been sowing to the flesh, we may most certainly in the year to come expect to reap corruption. And if in the past we have been sowing to the Spirit, we may expect to reap in this year the fruits of the Spirit in love, joy, and peace. I may remark that the words, "Ye have not passed this way heretofore," are not inconsistent with our certain knowledge that the days of the new year will introduce us to duties, trials, temptations, and, it may be, sufferings similar to those, if indeed not greater than those of the past year. As in the past, so in the future, we shall be called to serve and glorify the Lord—to love the Lord with all our heart, strength, soul, and mind, and our neighbours as ourselves. We shall be called to work the work of God, to believe in Jesus, and to walk as He also walked. We shall be called to be diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. "Study," therefore, my brother, "to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed," The new year will bring with it new trials, new afflictions. But as in the past, so in the future, the child of God may appropriate for his comfort the words, "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called, according to His purpose." Nothing "shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ our Lord." We know that the new year will bring with it new temptations. The passions that war in our members have not become extinct, have not passed away with the old year. They go with us into the new year. And as in the past, so in the future, they will entice us into sin. Satan has not ceased with the days of the former year. He enters with us into the days of this year. And into this year he carries all his subtlety, all his malice, all his guile. We know, therefore, that new temptations, new seducements to sin, will be laid in our path. The world has lost none of its many powers—none of its many arts of deception. We may, therefore, expect that the world will attempt to ensnare us in the future, just as it attempted to allure us in the past. But we must listen to the word that admonishes us, "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds." The new year may bring with it new forms of trial, unexpected sufferings and bereavements. It may bear to us the summons, "The Master is come, and calleth for thee." We cannot tell. But this we know, that preparedness to meet that summons—preparedness to meet the Lord, is a most blessed state of soul. But a fourth idea is involved in the words, "Ye have not passed this way heretofore"; it is that we may expect to witness or behold in this new way, in this untrodden path, new displays of the grace and power of the Lord, the leader and commander of His people. The way is unknown to us, but it is known to the Lord. And we are sure that He "leadeth His people by the right way, that they may go to the city of habitation—to that city whose founder and builder is God." (*G. Macaulay.*) *Ye have not passed this way heretofore*:—We are travelling onward, but the future is hidden from our eyes. We are not as those

whose path lies across an extensive plain, and the boundary of whose vision is far away, but rather like those who are journeying in a deep valley, and who cannot see the storms that may be gathering behind the mountains. Our horizon is very limited. What Jordans we may have to cross we know not. But we have an ark, of which that which accompanied Israel is but a faint and feeble shadow—an ark that is a stronger pledge of God's faithfulness, a deeper manifestation of His love and power. The Christian's ark is Christ. Jesus journeys with him through all the wilderness into the land of promise. Every congregation is made up of a number of minds, no two of which would probably be found to be exactly alike. There are, indeed, many points of resemblance which ought not to be overlooked. But with all this resemblance there is much diversity. There is something peculiar to each mind, something in which it is unlike its fellows. Each has some peculiar adjustment of its natural powers; and this necessarily causes a peculiar and distinctive history. Just so far as our minds are similarly constituted, and we are infected with the same awful disease, and united to the same Saviour, and influenced by the same Spirit, we can sympathise with each other. Just so far as there is something distinctive in our minds, modifying our experiences, and stamping a peculiar character upon our history, will our path be lonely; and we shall feel that there is One only who "knoweth the way that we take." But He does know it, and adapts His dealings to our need. Some are comparatively free from trial, others are called to bear their yoke in their youth. Some are just reached by the wave—the spray only seems to reach them; others are immersed in its depths—the waves and billows pass over them. And the history of these last bears greater resemblance to the varied experience of Israel; and yet even concerning these, with whom God has already dealt so mysteriously, it may come true in the future, "Ye have not passed this way heretofore." There may be some who are already entering a way that is new and mysterious to them. There was perhaps a time when they felt no anxiety or alarm about the great subject of their acceptance with God, and when the pleasures and enjoyments of the world filled up their thoughts; but a new impression has been made upon their minds, and they are beginning to be sensible that there is a great purpose for which they have been created, and, alas! they have not yet fulfilled it. And thus, like St. Paul, they find the commandment to be "unto death." "The law worketh wrath." How can this Jordan, which separates them with its overflowing waters from the land of peace, be crossed? There is but one path across it, and that path is Christ. Jesus, the ark of our covenant, is gone before us. But there is another period in our lives of which the passage of Israel through Jordan is a more exact type. We must acknowledge that there is something extremely awful in such a conclusion to our earthly pilgrimage as death; and the real wonder is, not that there are some who through fear of death are all their lifetime subject to bondage, but that there are such multitudes to whose thoughts this solemn and mysterious event is scarcely ever present, and on whose minds it makes no lasting impression. It lies quite beyond the bounds of our present experience. We may perfectly realise all the circumstances of death up to the moment of the separation of the soul from the body—the weakness, weariness, and pain of sickness, the tenderness and love of relations and friends in watching over us, and in smoothing our dying pillow—because in all this we have past experience to go upon, and we have only to imagine an increase of that which we have already felt. But when we endeavour to advance a step beyond this, and to realise the mysterious separation of the soul from the body, the loosening and snapping asunder of that invisible bond which unites them, we feel that we have stepped into a new region. Our past experiences fail us; and after trying much to realise it, we cannot but feel, "Ye have not passed this way heretofore." And yet both the unknown mystery of death and its loneliness have been fully provided for in Him who "through death destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil." For Jesus, the ark of our covenant, has gone down before us into Jordan. The dark stream of Jordan manifests His power and reflects His light. And thus the loneliness of death is overcome. But let us not forget that it is presumptuous to expect this blessed hope and confidence to arise in our hearts in the immediate prospect of death if we are neglecting and slighting the ark of our covenant at this moment. The symbol of God's presence did not meet the Israelites for the first time at the brink of Jordan, but accompanied them throughout all their journey in the wilderness. Let us take heed, then, to the impressive words, "Sanctify yourselves." As we have been "set apart" for God in our unconscious infancy, let us set ourselves apart for Him through faith in Christ in our conscious

manhood. Let us dedicate ourselves to Him wholly, unreservedly, body, soul, and spirit. (*G. Wagner.*) *The untrodden and unknown way:*—1. We need a guide to lead us in this new and untrodden way. Travellers in strange countries are careful not only to furnish themselves with a chart or map of the country through which they may be travelling, but to employ a guide who knows the country. At every station at which travellers are wont to halt in Switzerland, guides are waiting to conduct strangers along the way by which they wish to go. From motives of economy or self-confidence, some travellers have been known to dispense with the help of a guide, and have lost their way, missed their step, and perished. In the journey of life, and at a stage such as this at which we have arrived to-day, we are reminded that we need one to go before us and lead us in the way. We have in the Word of the Lord, in the Holy Scriptures, what may be called a map or chart, exhibiting the general outlines and prominent features of the country through which we are to pass, and indicating the direction of the path and way along which we are to walk. But we need more than this—we need a living guide. And that living guide is not a fallible man, or company of men, but is the Lord Himself. His knowledge of the way is perfect; and no one that committed himself to His guidance ever perished by the way. For all His resources of knowledge, wisdom, grace, righteousness, and power, all are pledged to conduct in safety to the bliss of heaven those who by faith follow Him. 2. We must be obedient to the instructions of the heavenly Guide. In order to this we must be distrustful of our own knowledge and wisdom. Many a traveller amidst Alpine passes and heights has fallen and perished, the victim of self-confidence. And many who for a season seemed to be obedient unto Christ have departed from Him and perished, because they preferred their own wisdom to His. But it is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps. In order to a faithful adherence to the guidance of the Lord, we must beware of false and deceitful guides. If we are among the obedient followers of Christ, we shall watch for the intimations of His will. That Word shineth in this dark world that it may be to us what the star was to the eastern sages, a light to guide our steps to the heavenly palace, the house where Jesus now reigns. Yes, if we would follow Christ in the way, His Word must be "a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path." As obedient followers of Christ we must be not only earnest and humble students of His Word, but thoughtful observers of His works in providence and in grace. 3. We should prepare ourselves for following our heavenly Guide and Leader in the way heretofore untrodden by us. "Sanctify yourselves," said Joshua to the people, "for to-morrow the Lord will do wonders among you." This involves separation from all that is unholy, or that is inconsistent with the undivided and entire consecration of ourselves in heart, purpose, and life to the Lord. And it requires that we dedicate ourselves, soul, body, and spirit, unto the Lord. (*G. Macaulay.*) **Sanctify yourselves.**—*Solemn preparation for duty:*—Sequester yourselves from all earthly employments, and set apart some time for solemn preparation to meet God in duty. You cannot come hot, reeking out of the world into God's presence, but you will find the influence of it in your duties. It is with the heart a few minutes since plunged in the world, now at the feet of God, just as with the sea after a storm, which still continues working muddy and disquiet, though the wind be laid and storm over: thy heart must have some time to settle. There are few musicians that can take down a lute or viol and play presently upon it without some time to tune it. When thou goest to God in any duty, take thy heart aside, and say, "O my soul, I am now addressing myself to the greatest work that ever a creature was employed about. I am going into the awful presence of God, about business of everlasting moment." (*H. G. Salter.*) *Prepare for seasons of grace:*—The grace of God at all times awaits, forecomes, accompanies, follows, encompasses us. It is everywhere, for it is the Holy Spirit, who is everywhere, since He is God. But although grace is ever around and in those who have not finally rejected it, there are special seasons at which it comes to individuals and to the Church—seasons in which grace does not only trickle down as the dew, but runs down like a river, sweeping away all the barriers of earthliness, and bearing us onward like a tide; seasons which if we miss we know not what we lose: the wave has passed by, and we who might have been borne upon its crest, and carried safe, are tossing to and fro on a perilous sea. Such seasons, to individuals, are the first drawings of the child's tender soul to God; its first stirrings at the thought that it is not a citizen of this earth, that it belongs to heaven, to eternity, to God; its first yearning to go forth out of itself to be for ever God's. Such again are its first strong upliftings in prayer, and following

the drawings of God, and pantings after communion with Him, as it seeks to rise on, and on, and on, tremblingly, yet aspiringly, if by any means it might reach to God! or its quiet waiting within itself, if so be He would come down to it. But although He comes to all alike who look for Him, He doth not come alike to all. He filleth all; but all do not alike contain Him. Our capacity to receive Him, is our longing for Him. The greater the hunger of the soul after righteousness, the more He will feed and satisfy it who is our righteousness. And so, whenever God would draw near to man, He would have man prepare for that awful nearness. We cannot on the instant change our whole tone of mind. We cannot at one moment jest, the next be devout; at one moment care for earth, the next for heaven; at one, love the creature for itself, the next the Creator for Himself. Nature itself tells us that we cannot pass suddenly from one to another. If we have heavy news to convey, we try to prepare the mind, that they burst not at once upon it. If a solemn thought crosses the soul in laughter, it recovers itself, as it can, hastily and confusedly together, and the very disorder of the mind shows that the sudden change is against nature. The soul feels ashamed that it was so relaxed before, so little in the state wherein it would receive the Heavenly Visitant. And this teaching of God in our hearts He enforced in the outward nearness of His visible presence. When He willed to appear in awe on Mount Sinai, for three days was the congregation to prepare itself. Whether in chastisement or in mercy there is a season of preparation. Whether God would give them flesh to eat in the wilderness, or lead them over Jordan, or take out from among them him who had taken the accursed thing, it is still one word—"Sanctify yourselves against to-morrow." If such was the preparation for the type and shadow, what for the reality? If such for the miraculous sustenance of the body, what for the food of the soul? If such the entrance into the type of heaven, what when heaven and earth are united in one? And so an apostle's voice warns us, "Let a man examine himself," sift himself, "and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup." And God has taught the Church to place longer seasons of preparation before the greater mysteries of the faith. "Sanctify yourselves," saith God—that is, "separate yourselves from things unholy, that ye may be separated unto Me, and I may hallow you, and make you holy." We cannot hallow ourselves; but we can, by His grace, put off things unholy. We cannot give to ourselves Him, the True Bread from heaven, nor create in ourselves hunger after Him, our righteousness; but we can abstain, through His gracious aid, from filling our bellies with the swine-husk this world's goods, and vanities, and accursed pleasures, which make men loathe, as "light bread," "the manna which cometh down from heaven." Oh, then, if we "have been sometime darkness," seek we now to be "light in the Lord." Let us now "cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armour of light." (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*) *Sanctify yourselves*:—Is it possible for a Christian to sanctify himself? Yes; for man has a part to play in his own sanctification. Man must co-operate with God in working out his own salvation. Man works, God works, and the result is man's sanctification. Many Christians have failed to recognise this union of the human and the Divine in the work of their sanctification, with the result that they have erred greatly, and made little or no progress in the Divine life. For example, we find Christians who overlook the fact that man is to work out his own salvation; they say it is all of God, and they throw themselves passively on God for their sanctification. This course of action, or rather want of action, ends in their becoming impractical and useless Christians, making no progress themselves in the Divine life, and of no use to the Church in its fight against sin and Satan. On the other hand, we find Christians who overlook the fact that it is God who worketh in man both to will and to work. Such try to work out their salvation in their own strength; they seek, by power of will, to overcome their weaknesses and their sinful tendencies, and in this they are largely successful. They attain to the point of being free from all gross and outward sins of the flesh. But, alas! they make no progress in eradicating the sin of their heart. There is no internal change of heart corresponding with the outward reformation in life. This course of action leads to spiritual decay and death. Man cannot sanctify himself. The work of sanctification is carried on in the heart of the believer by the co-operation of the human and the Divine: man works, God works. God, in all His dealings with man, in grace, recognises man as a free agent, capable of receiving or rejecting His grace. Man is not passive, he is active. He is of his own free will to yield to the influence of the Spirit of God. He is to resist sin. He is to prove how he may most successfully overcome temptation. He is to keep

himself unspotted from the world. He is ever to be watchful. In fact, he is to act as if everything in his sanctification depended upon himself. This is the point which I wish to emphasise to-day, namely, man's work in his own sanctification. How, then, are we to sanctify ourselves? I. By separating ourselves from every known sin. It is pre-supposed that we are true Christians, that we have been regenerated; for no sanctification is possible before conversion; the order is, first justification, then sanctification. The seed of the tree of righteousness, planted at conversion, must pass through many stages before the seed has grown into a tree of righteousness. The tender plant, the sapling, the young tree, the mature tree. Before it comes to maturity, it has to be watched and tended and watered and digged about and pruned. Its growth is a very gradual process. Even so is the growth of the soul in holiness. If we would sanctify ourselves the first thing we must do is to separate ourselves from known sin. It may be that our sin lies in eating and drinking too much. Our easy circumstances enable us to live a life of leisure and luxury. If we wish the blessing of God, we must separate ourselves from these sins. It may be that our sin lies in being vain and proud: our vanity is seen in our dress and in our behaviour; our pride is seen in our bearing to equals and inferiors. If we wish the blessing of God, we must separate ourselves from these sins. It may be that our sin lies in unbelief. This is the sin of sins. We limit the Holy One of Israel. Practically, we say God can do this for me, but He cannot do this other thing—I must do it for myself. If we wish the blessing of God, we must separate ourselves from this sin of unbelief. In fact, whatever be our known sin, we must separate ourselves from it. To do this thoroughly we must go about it with firmness of purpose, with a fixed determination. Which of us have resisted unto blood, striving against sin? We need nerve so to resist sin. The motto of the Irish family of O'Neill is "The Bloody Hand." It had its origin in the following incident:—In days of old the leader of a band of pirates gave out that whoever first touched the land they were making for should be possessor of it. One of the band, named O'Neill, determined to gain it; he pulled ashore with all his might, but a rival passed him when near the shore. What was to be done? Instantly this strong-nerved, resolute, determined man rose, lifted his battle-axe, struck off his hand, threw it ashore, and so touched the land first. This nerve and resolution was shown to gain a possession of land. What will we do to gain possession of ourselves? Will we deal thus resolutely with sin? Yes. We will cut it off, and cast it from us. I make a distinction between known sin and unknown sin. If we live up to the light we have, and deal faithfully with the sin which God has revealed to us in our lives, He will give us more light. This is what is meant by gradual sanctification. The more we know of the holiness of God, the more will we know of our own want and holiness. As we grow in grace, our spiritual eye becomes keener, and we see new sins in our life which were not manifest before. When we discern these sins, we are to deal with them at once, and separate ourselves from them. II. Besides separating ourselves from every known sin, it is necessary, if we would be ready to meet with God, to prepare our hearts and minds. Our hearts and minds must be set on God, so that we may be ready to hear, and to remember, and to obey. Every appetite and passion must be stilled; the cares and anxieties and the work of the world are to be set aside. We must give as much time as we can to reading and meditating upon the Word of God, so filling our hearts and minds with the truth. We must spend long periods in prayer, following the example of our blessed Master, who spent whole nights in prayer. If we would be thoroughly prepared to meet God, we must dwell on the thought of what God is—the Holy One of Israel, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the God of our salvation. We must come to God in a spirit of expectant faith, believing that He is able and willing to enrich us with all spiritual blessing, and that He will give to each of us the very blessing which we need. The more we are prepared in heart and mind to meet with God, the greater blessing shall we receive. To great faith our gracious Saviour still says: "Be it done unto thee even as thou wilt." (*Wm. Galbraith.*) *The wise conduct of human life*:—The wise conduct of human life is foreshadowed in this story. The crises men encounter are to be met; the Jordans that block their way are to be crossed, as Israel met its trial hour, as Israel passed the river that barred it from its possession. I. Men should sanctify themselves. A religious frame of mind, and the habit of looking at life from a religious point of view, are acquirements of great importance. A true Christian soon learns by experience that all his times are in God's hands. Each new difficulty encountered brings to mind how, in the past, all things have

been made to work together for good; and so, though "perplexed," the believer is not "in despair." II. MEN MUST FOLLOW THE GUIDANCE OF THE DIVINE LAW AND THE DIVINE LOVE. Sinai and Calvary are both guide-posts pointing out the right and the safe way. God's commandment, as well as God's grace, helps men out of their difficulties. It is imperative, in times of trial, that they should trust in the Divine mercy, but quite as important that they should do what seems to be the Divine will. III. MEN MUST PATIENTLY WAIT GOD'S TIME. Deliverance out of difficulty is not always immediately granted. The Divine promise is sure, but the time of its fulfilment is not announced. Because the prayer for escape from threatening dangers is not answered in a moment, let us not therefore "cast away our confidence, which has great recompense of reward." And this is eminently true in regard to the last Jordan which we are required to cross. Dying grace is held in reserve for dying hours. The Lord of both life and death will be ready when the time arrives. The dark river will be, not a barrier, but a highway lighted by the glory beyond. (*Sermons by the Monday Club.*) *Sanctify yourselves*:—I. IN DWELLING UPON THE PLACE IN GOD'S PLAN OF PREPARED MEN AND WOMEN. There are men and women with whom God will work, and there are men and women with whom He will not work. Who are those with whom God will work? As a general rule, those who sanctify themselves for His work; that is, separate themselves by a thoughtful detachment from other engagements to make this work of His the prior thing. II. IN DWELLING ON THE FACT OF OUR ABSOLUTE DEPENDENCE UPON GOD. This is true in all things. It is signally true in the work of setting up His kingdom in the earth. There were things which Israel could do. There were things which they could not do without a signal, Divine interposition. Ever and again the Christian Church comes to the bank of some swift river. The obstacles in the way of her progress are like Jordan with full banks. Then ever let her sanctify herself with the humbling but precious thoughts of her absolute dependence upon a Divine intervention. III. IN DWELLING UPON THE NEED OF THE DIVINE PRESENCE. This was a thought which ever lived with Moses: "If Thy presence go not with me, take us not up hence." The presence of God is sometimes withdrawn. Sometimes it is especially manifested. A leader needs credentials. A leader of God's people needs Divine credentials. The work we attempt requires God's presence. We are wholly dependent upon God to bring us across the river, and we shall need His presence on the other shore. It is sanctifying to couple with the thought of our dependence on God this other of the efficacy of His presence. IV. IN DWELLING UPON THE REASONS FOR CROSSING THE JORDAN. The land was to be subjugated for God. It was to be taken for Him and settled for Him, and thus make a part of the kingdom of God. The great, main reason for desiring to see God's work revived is that His kingdom may come in power; that the city and the nation and the world may be His. V. IN DWELLING UPON WHAT GOD HAS DONE. This is the day of common sense in religious matters. Our fathers were superstitious. In these days science has come to the forefront, and the religion of the supernatural has been superseded. When these doubts arise and press us, when they beset us and whisper and roar about us in the air, it is good to remember what God has done. The God of the Red Sea is the God of the Jordan. VI. THEY WOULD BE AIDED IN SANCTIFYING THEMSELVES BY REFLECTING UPON WHAT IT WOULD BE TO TURN BACK—after forty years in the wilderness, to turn back once more and give up the hopes of entering the land of promise; again to go from camp to camp in a maze of wanderings and die in the wilderness. Joshua and Caleb with the rest, after all! Would not this thought most powerfully move them to embrace God's service? to set themselves apart to utmost co-operation in His plan, with unquestioning faith to follow the ark? Which things are a parable. Many Churches, many Christians, have the experience of coming up in the full view of great blessings, promised blessings, and turning back. Is it so irksome a thing, then, to make the kingdom of heaven first, that we are willing, after all, even after getting a close view of the blessing, after God has promised that this blessing shall be put in our very hands, that we shall turn back rather than sanctify ourselves? (*G. R. Leavitt.*) *Success in Divine work*:—I. THE CONDITION OF SUCCESS IN WORK FOR GOD IS HOLINESS. 1. Purity. Spiritual purity means power and beauty. It has a passive side (Ezek. xxxvi. 25). But it has an active side (Jas. iv. 8). 2. Consecration. That person, possession, or thing is consecrated which is given to God according to His will and pleasure. 3. Obedience. No practical holiness is possible without obedience. For what is sin but disobedience? 4. But these three—purity, consecration, and obedience—do not set before us a complete idea of what the Bible means by holiness. It must have an inner life of

which these are but the outer manifestations. The very heart of it is the indwelling presence of God's Holy Spirit. II. THE CAUSE OF THE CHURCH'S SUCCESS. The Divine power. Christ has not said, "Follow Me" to any one to whom He has not also said, "My grace is sufficient for thee, My strength is made perfect in thy weakness." When God says, "Sanctify yourselves," it is the height of presumption and unbelief for us to sit down and say we cannot do it. The Lord is able to fulfil His promises. It is for us to obey. (*Homilist.*) *Consecration* :—The context of this command, which gives such prominence to the wonders which God will do, is a happy correction of a very common notion respecting consecration, as though it were some great giving to God by us, some surrender or sacrifice of what we previously held; in fact, a sort of favour conferred upon Him, whereas it is only the readiness to receive from Him. Consecration is not a meritorious work of our own, but a willingness to let the Lord work His wonders upon us. It simply means a ready recipiency. Yet even this recipiency may involve surrender in a subordinate way, as it evidently did in the case of the Israelites. They could not possibly receive Canaan without giving up the wilderness. That command, therefore, "sanctify yourselves," was a call to heart-searching. It pressed home to all their thoughts this recognition, "We are the Lord's." It could not long remain a matter of doubt with any whether they stood ready for God to lead them over Jordan or not. The command given them was completely overshadowed by the promise that followed, and yet it was the promise itself that tested and tried the very intents of their hearts. It continues to be a part of the manifold wisdom of God to furnish such tests, even in providing our richest blessings. He who becomes a man must put away his childish things. The lingering child-nature struggles and shrinks from the sacrifice, but the spirit of the strong man uprising spares not the old treasures as he reaches on to the new. God cannot fill our hands with His great and good gifts till we drop the baubles they have held. And so in every onward step, calling us to some surrender, to some sacrifice, He clears away the superficial wrappings of our nature to learn what soundness exists beneath. (*S. F. Smiley.*) **To-morrow the Lord will do wonders among you.**—*Critical times and places in life* :—It was an hour and place of wonderful contrasts. As they remembered there swept vividly before their thought the recollection of the harsh experiences through which they had passed—the savagery of the roadless country they had traversed; the trials they had suffered in their restless journey, whose hurry allowed no opportunity for building a home. The backward look recalled nothing but weariness and sorrow—the only satisfying thing about it the fact that it was past. But, as they anticipated, they saw a fairer vision —of quiet homes; of orchards fragrant with blossoms and vineyards purple with grapes; of lands securely held; of children gathered round the family hearthstone; of all the blessings of organised, coherent society. The desert and the garden were both in full view; and their joyful expectation was that henceforth the garden, and not the desert, was to be their home. But—and there is often a "but" between men's hopes and their realisation—but between the desert and the garden there was a barrier. The stream must be crossed before vision could change to possession; and how cross it? There were no bridges spanning the river over which they might march in solid procession; there were no boats in which they might be ferried over in little companies; there were no fords through which they might pass one by one; the boldest swimmer would be like a straw in that hurrying flood. There are critical hours in all lives. Almost every experience has its crises and turning-points of greater or less magnitude. There are single moments and actions that like rudders steer us into wide seas of triumph or misfortune. Sufficiency of preparation to meet such hours, and acuteness enough to discover when they come, are indispensable to human success. There is one truth that men need to thoroughly learn: there is no such thing as "good luck" in the universe. As the old Chinese proverb puts it, "What will you have? says God; pay for it and take it." Success is not an inheritance or an accident. The men who are ready for emergencies are the men who win the victories. History is full of brilliant illustrations of this truth. The whole course of empire appears to pivot on single men and isolated hours. There was a critical hour in the history of the rebellion when statesmanship confessed itself at fault, and military strategy was ineffectual, and the nation was almost in despair; but when Abraham Lincoln affixed his signature to the Emancipation Proclamation, and announced, as the policy of the Government, "Henceforth all for justice," a new power entered the contest, and the future was secure. From that hour the multiplied forces of Omnipotence were auxiliaries. The muster-

roll held the names of the smallest part of the army. The morning *réveillé* wakened a host unseen by mortal eyes. The long roll of the drums set in battle array a great company out of sight. Side by side with the nation's flag that waved over the charging lines floated the ensign of the Lord of hosts. Every seeming defeat became a real victory, and triumph followed triumph until the last enemy was subdued. The single act of the single man was the principal factor in the solution of the vast and complicated problem. In less dramatic form the same thing may sometimes be noted in individual experience. The selection of a business or occupation is an everyday matter, and yet what vast results may follow the wisdom or folly of the choice! The world took little note of the young tutor in Yale College, some half-century ago, walking up and down his room considering whether he had better take part in the revival movement then in progress; but the decision of that hour reversed all the previous purposes of the young man's life, and gave to the Church of God Horace Bushnell with his wonderful eloquence and measureless sweep of influence. Young men do well to be serious when they stand at the cross-roads of life, considering along which highway they will travel. In every man's life there comes one sovereign hour—the hour when he makes his final choice of God or the world, and settles the question whether he will pass time and eternity in the wilderness, or make himself an everlasting home in the Canaan of promise. All preceding experience leads up to that hour; all after-experience takes colour and substance from it. (*Sermons by the Monday Club.*) *The wonders in store for God's people:*—I. WONDERS ARE IN STORE FOR US IN THE GREAT FUTURE TO WHICH WE LOOK FORWARD. II. WE MAY BE NOW ON THE VERY EVE OF THE WONDERS WHICH GOD HAS PROVIDED FOR US, AND WHICH SHALL BE WROUGHT AT GOD'S TIME AND IN GOD'S WAY. We cannot lift up the veil which hangs over the future. What manner of person ought I to be? To-morrow I may stand before God. III. IT BECOMES US TO SANCTIFY OURSELVES IN ORDER THAT WE MAY BE MADE MEET FOR THE WONDERS WHICH WE MUST SEE AND PASS THROUGH WHENEVER THEY MAY COME UPON US. (*Pulpit Studies.*) *To-morrow: spiritual foresight:*—This "morrow" is always coming upon prepared hearts. The unsanctified man sees nothing of all the mysteries of God. He is "blind and cannot see afar off." "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Will the Lord come to those who have made no preparation for Him, and will He hasten to houses whose door is shut against His Anointed? "Blessed is that servant who when his Lord cometh shall be found waiting." A beautiful law is this, by which Joshua knows the secret of the Lord a full day before it is known by others. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him." If the light comes first to the mountains, need the valleys peevishly complain? As a matter of fact some men are privileged beyond others in insight, and that strange sympathetic anticipation which often assumes prophetic dignity and certitude. Such men are teachers sent from God. The spirit that is in them is a spirit of rulership and command, and their supremacy is allowed without being claimed. Wonderful is the gift of utterance; when the poet speaks we feel that he has said something which we wished to say ourselves, and which, being said, we know to be wholly true. So, too, there are time-keepers appointed by God. Sometimes we do the right thing at the wrong hour, and thus our blow is wasted in the air. Our impatience would rush upon the Jordan, and we should be drowned. Lord, teach us how to wait; and when Thy commanding word comes, may we all be ready. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *God reveals His purposes by degrees:*—God often opens His hand by one finger at a time, and leaves us face to face with some plain but difficult duty, without letting us see the helps to its performance till we need to use them. If we go right on the road which He has traced out it will never lead us into a blind alley. The mountains will open before us as we come near what looked their impassable wall; and some narrow gorge or other, wide enough to run a track through, but not wide enough to be noticed before we are close on it, will be sure to open. The attitude of expectation of God's help, while its nature is unrevealed, is kept up in Joshua's last instruction. The people are bidden to sanctify themselves because to-morrow the Lord will do wonders among them. That sanctifying was not external, but included the hallowing of spirit by docile waiting for His intervention and obedience while the manner of it was hidden. The secret of to-morrow is partly made known, and the faith of the people is nourished by the mystery remaining, as well as by the light given. The best security for to-morrow's wonders is to-day's sanctifying. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) **This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel.**—*God's regard for His servants:*—How full and manifold the assurance! First, I will magnify thee.

I will endue thee with supernatural might, and that will give you authority and weight corresponding to the position in which you stand. Further, this shall be but the beginning of a process which will be renewed as often as there is occasion for it. "This day I will begin." You are not to go a warfare on your own charges, but "as your days, so shall your strength be." Moreover, this exaltation of your person and office will take place "in the sight of all Israel," so that no man of them shall ever be justified in refusing you allegiance and obedience. And to sum up—you shall be just as Moses was; the resources of My might will be as available for you as they were for him. After this, what misgivings could Joshua have? Could he doubt the generosity, the kindness, the considerateness of his Master? It is an experience which has been often repeated in the case of those who have had to undertake difficult work for their Master. Of all our misapprehensions the most baseless and the most pernicious is that God does not care much about us, and that we have not much to look for from Him. It is a misapprehension which dishonours God greatly, and which He is ever showing Himself most desirous to remove. It stands fearfully in the way of that spirit of trust by which God is so much honoured, and which He is ever desirous that we should show. And those who have trusted God, and have gone forward to their work in His strength, have always found delightful evidence that their trust has not been in vain. What is the testimony of our great Christian philanthropists, our most successful missionaries, and other devoted Christian workers? Led to undertake enterprises far beyond their strength, and undergo responsibilities far beyond their means, we know not a single case in which they have not had ample proof of the mindfulness of their Master, and found occasion to wonder at the considerateness and the bountifulness which He has brought to bear upon their position. And is it not strange that we should be so slow to learn how infinite God is in goodness? (*W. G. Blaikie, D.D.*) *Being made great:*—It was a great undertaking to follow Moses. How came Joshua to succeed when it seemed so likely he would fail? 1. Because—looking at the human side of the question—(1) he did not foolishly try to reproduce his master and leader, to be a second Moses, but wisely strove to be his true self, and to do the particular work which God gave him to do; and (2) he entered upon and carried out his work in a spirit of complete devotedness to it; he lived to accomplish the one thing with which he was charged. 2. Because—looking at the Divine side of it—God was with him, encouraging and sustaining him. God made him great. He magnified him in the sense of the text, *i.e.*, He raised him in the estimation of the people so that he received as much honour from them as even Moses enjoyed. God also magnified Joshua by making him strong, worthy, even great in himself. God held such close intercourse with him, so guided and disciplined him, so influenced and inspired him, that Joshua became a thoroughly true, loyal-hearted servant, a godly man living a faithful, consecrated life. Without the latter there would have been something unreal about the former. For there is—I. A GREATNESS WE MUST DECLINE. 1. We may not seek to be made great by appearing better or wiser than we are. 2. We may not wish to occupy a position greater than that which we can honourably fill. II. A GREATNESS TO BE COVETED AND ATTAINED. How should we care to be magnified? We should aspire to the two elements of greatness which God gave to Joshua, though in us they take a different form. 1. Honour or esteem. We may well dispense with the obsequious or the ceremonious, but we cannot be indifferent to the respectful. Homage we can do without, but the esteem of the wise and good we crave and should secure. 2. Influence. In the home in which we live, in the school in which we teach or learn, in the sphere of daily activity, in the social circle, and in the Church of Christ, we can all be exerting influence: we can be such and can live such lives that we shall be continually restraining from the evil, and impelling toward the right and the true course. And how will God magnify us? (1) By building up in us a strong Christian character. In that strange experience through which God caused Joshua and Israel to pass (chap. iii.), both he and the priests were disciplined in faith, in obedience, and in steadfastness. By the privileges of the gospel and by the outworkings of His providence God is building us up in these and in other attributes of character, and is thus "making us great" and strong in His sight. (2) By closely associating Himself with us. Joshua was magnified in the sight of Israel in that henceforth he was known to be a man who had God upon his side, to be one who could lean on God's strength and be sustained. God magnifies His servant now by causing him to be regarded by all who know him as one who walks with God, with whom God dwells, on whose side the Holy One, the Almighty One is ranged. III. A GREATNESS WE CAN EXTEND OR

CONFER. 1. We magnify God when we adore Him and celebrate His greatness and His faithfulness. 2. We magnify Christ when we commend Him and His gospel by lip and by life: when we constrain others to know and feel the pricelessness of His love, the excellency of His service, the greatness of His promises (see Phil. i. 20). 3. We make our brethren great, in the best sense, when we lead them into the path of heavenly wisdom. (*W. Clarkson, B.A.*) *Divine honours*:—Joshua has not been a stranger to Divine honours. He has been chosen to succeed Moses, and so installed into the highest office in Israel. But greater honours are in store for him; and to-day he is to receive some of these. He is to receive them not for self-glorification, but to glorify God, since they are to be evidences to the people that God is with him as He was with Moses. Much is said about worldly honours, and thousands are struggling every day to obtain them. They are characterised by three things, which we would do well to remember. They are few in number. Hence the great majority of the human family must live and die without them. Their duration is brief. Suppose they are bestowed on one when he comes of age, and that he is allowed to retain them till his death, which is not always the case, they can only be his for about fifty years. They are expensive and sometimes exceedingly embarrassing. To maintain them numbers have been brought to the margin, if they have not been driven over it, of monetary ruin. The old saying is still true in many instances: "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown." In view of these characteristics of all worldly honours, we may well ponder the question, is the game worthy of chase? How different are Divine honours! All can receive them if they please, for the Lord has said: "Them that honour Me I will honour." Like the soul they are immortal; time does not dim them; death will not touch them, and in eternity they will shine forth with a radiance above the brightness of the sun. May we all aspire to the honours which come from God only, and abundantly obtain them. They are indeed worthy possessions. (*A. McAuslane.*)

Vers. 9–13. **Come hither, and hear the words of the Lord.**—*The environment of worship*:—That is a bold challenge. That is a voice we need. Every age wants some Joshua, some mighty soldier of the Cross, to say, "Come, hear the upper music, the Divine melody, the holy revelation." Have we the hearing ear? If we could hear better we could hear more. "Come hither." Does that indicate a point in space, a place, a boundary, a sanctuary? If so, it would be quite in keeping with Oriental thought in general, and with Jewish habit in particular. Always religious exercise was associated with locality—with the mountain, with the city, with the temple, with the tabernacle, with the terebinth, with some place made sacred by historic communes and wrestlings with God. Christ said, "The time cometh and now is when neither in this mountain nor at Jerusalem (particularly and exclusively) shall men worship the Father," but wherever there is a human spirit desiring the upward way, the higher light, the noonday of thought, and hope, and peace, wherever there is such a soul God is there, and God is the Author of it. Yet Jesus Christ Himself went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day—one of the evangelists says, "as was His custom." Beware lest in supposing ourselves able to grasp the all we grasp nothing. The universe is too big really for any one of us to grasp; we had better, therefore, have a little place cornered off and call it the Church, the sanctuary, the little temporary hostelry and lodging-place. All the earth is the Lord's. Men are now in danger of worshipping totals, the Unspeakable All, the incognisable infinite, as the metaphysicians call it. We may believe in all that grandeur of immeasurableness, and yet at the same time we go home every evening. Home—but the earth is the Lord's: why do you not live out in the open air? What do you want with home? you are a worshipper of Humanity, all space: why do you go home? You cannot keep away from the old place: the loved ones are there, all the lives that make your life a possible joy are there; all the holy, shadowy, tender memories are there—the old seat, the old books, the old fire that talks as it crackles and blazes are there. "Come." Why, the mere coming does us good, the very walk to church reddens the blood. The hunter says the delight is in the chase; not in the death of the hunted animal, but in the flight, the leap, the bound, the dash. The coming, the act of locomotion and the act signified by locomotion, will do us good. For what purpose shall we come? "Come hither, and hear the words of the Lord your God." That is the purpose. Not to hear the words of men. We are now here before God to hear what He will say unto us—"Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth." What shall

we hear? Shall we hear the words of some strange deity? Nay, "hear the words of the Lord your God." It is a family meeting. These pronouns seem to bring us into sacred and general possession of things in common with God. Your God, our Father, my God, your fathers' God: these are the terms in which the greatness and the nearness of God are typified to our dull imagination. When you hear the words of the Lord your God they will not be strange, inarticulate, untranslatable thunder; they will be gospels, voices of music, voices of welcome, tender assurances, great offers of love, sublime propositions of pardon; you will know every word of the speech, being neither affrighted by its majesty nor rendered indifferent by its condescension. To be able to receive such words—is that an insignificant sign? To know God's voice—is not that an evidence of man's greatness? (*J. Parker, D.D.*) **Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you.**—*The best helper*:—Observe the form which the purpose of the miracle assumes there. It is the confirmation of the Divine presence, not with the leader, but with the people and their consequent victory. Joshua grasped the inmost meaning of God's word to himself, and showed noble self-suppression, when he thus turned the direction of the miracle. The true servant of God knows that God is with him, not for his personal glorification, but for the welfare of God's people, and cares little for the estimation in which men hold him, if they will only believe that the conquering God is with them. We too often make great leaders and teachers in the Church opaque barriers to hide God from us, instead of transparent windows through which He shines upon His people. We are a great deal more ready to say "God is with him," than to add, "and therefore God is with us, in our Joshuas, and without them." Observe the grand emphasis of that name, "the living God," tacitly contrasted with the dead idols of the enemies, and sealing the assurance of His swift and all-conquering might. Observe, too, the triumphant contempt in the enumeration of the many tribes of the foe with their barbarous names. Five of them had been enough, when named by the spies' trembling lips, to terrify the congregation, but here the list of the whole seven but strengthens confidence. Faith delights to look steadily at its enemies, knowing that the one Helper is more than they all. This catalogue breathes the same spirit as Paul's rapturous list of the foes impotent to separate from the love of God. Mark, too, the long-drawn-out designation of the ark, with its accumulation of nouns, which grammatical purists have found difficult,—"the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth"; where it leads they need not fear to follow. It was the pledge of His presence, it contained the ten words on which His covenant was concluded. That covenant enlisted on their side Him who was Lord of the swollen river as of all the fierce clans beyond; and with His ark in front their victory was sure. Then follows the command to elect twelve representatives of the tribes, for a purpose not yet explained; and then, at the last moment, the manner of crossing is disclosed, to the silencing of wise doubters and the confirmation of ignorant faith. The brief anticipatory announcement of the miracle puts stress on the arrest of the waters at the instant when the priests' feet touched them, and tells what is to befall the arrested torrent above the point where the ark stood, saying nothing about the lower stretch of the river, and just hinting by one word, "heap," the parallel between this miracle and that of the passing of the Red Sea (Exod. xv. 8). (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) **The ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth.**—The emphasis with which here and ver. 13 Jehovah is called "the Lord of all the earth" is very significant. This miracle demonstrated His power over all nature. He who can by His word suspend the operation of material laws, and whose bidding the forces of the world obey, is the supreme ruler of the world. As such all that it contains is at His sovereign disposal. As "the living God" has the power, so "the Lord of all the earth" has the right to bestow the land of Canaan upon whomsoever He pleases. Joshua and Israel were under no delusion in claiming that the Most High had given them this land. They were acting under no fanatical impulse. And their conduct gives no sanction to crusades elsewhere waged by those who have imagined themselves the special favourites of heaven, and pleaded a Divine right for their acts of rapine and bloodshed. Israel's credentials were of the most palpable character. The miracle which attended their march was God's own attestation to the fact that they were working His will. And as Jehovah is the Lord of all the earth, He shall one day be universally worshipped and obeyed. The covenant of God with Israel has sometimes been decried as the offspring of a narrow mind, which would limit the Divine favour to a particular nation. But it is here joined with the widest universality; and one

purpose of this particular miracle wrought on Israel's behalf is declared (chap. iv. 24) to be that all the people of the earth might learn a lesson of Jehovah's greatness. (*W. H. Green, D.D.*) *The ark of God; visible aids in religion:*—In the ark Israel saw God Himself, and yet lost none of their faith in the spiritual character of God. When the ark rested, Israel knew that God was among them; when the ark moved, then Israel believed that God was calling them to journey on again, and sang, "Let God arise, and let His enemies be scattered," &c.; when, again, the ark rested, they ceased to move forward, and sang, "Return, O Lord, to the many thousands of Israel." There was ever before the people of Israel the words of that commandment which forbade their ever thinking of God under any human, any material form, so that they had to content themselves with the ark of the covenant. But God, all this time, was preparing for a new manifestation of Himself in the Person of the Son, who was to take upon Him the form of His own highest creation, so that no longer should it be a sin to think of God under the likeness of a man. The man who depreciates the idea of a visible Church, and rejects externals in religion, has one side of the truth very clearly revealed to him; but I venture to think that not only is this one side insisted on to the exclusion of another equally true, but his position is maintained against certain unalterable facts, of which the first and foremost is, that our souls, through which alone, he argues, communion may be held with God, are imprisoned within material bodies, and cannot in this life, in the ordinary course, receive impressions of spiritual things except through the medium of those bodies. Israel in the wilderness was, no doubt, often very unworthy of the high calling which belonged to the chosen people; but they did succeed in living a life from which everything was removed except the prospect of the heavenly rewards. They knew they should not inherit temporal promises, and yet they patiently lived their lives in expectation of spiritual things. And during these lives they were guided by "the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth," and by the system of worship provided for them by God. We are looking, or ought to be looking, for like heavenly promises, and while we are in the flesh we shall find help, comfort, encouragement, and strength from these outward ordinances, which God has given us in His holy Church. (*E. Smith, B.A.*) **As soon as the soles of the feet . . . shall rest in the waters of Jordan.**—*Committal:*—The first step was to be taken in the waters. They were called upon not only to face the difficulties, but to enter them. They were not to ask God to prove His power first. They were to trust Him first, and then should they see as they followed on to know the Lord, "His giving forth" to be "prepared as the morning." How fatal had been a halt, although but one step short of the brim of the waters! Even the foot uplifted, ready to fall as soon as the path was ready, would have waited in vain. The promise was addressed only to the faith that, without seeing signs and wonders, could yet believe. That one step taken which proved their faith, and placed it in a position of entire receptivity—then God could prove His faithfulness and manifest His power. His wonders follow at once. The lesson which is here taught us is of the utmost importance, showing us the very essence of all true faith. Mature faith must be able to dare and to endure, with no other stay than seeing Him who is invisible. Our Father does, indeed, stretch out the hand of yearning tenderness to steady the tottering steps of a babe. In His pity and compassion He will not forbid the poor cripple his staff; but the faith of full years and of steady strength can never be developed by continued indulgence. It must be exercised by reason of use. Again, that God, instead of giving His people some visible aid for their crossing, set before them a most visible hindrance, doubling the danger and difficulty to the natural eye, is in perfect accord with our advanced experience. Only how often does the simplicity of our faith fail to equal theirs. It is the first instinctive impulse of unbelief to seek a sign—to have something to interpose between itself and the bare word of God. And so, how often is the question asked: "If God be really disposed to bring me into this glorious liberty, will there not be at least some token of it? Shall I find no evidence of it in my own altered feelings; and especially will not the Lord prepare the way by lowering the opposing tide of temptation?" The word of our God needs neither sign nor surety. Be it a promise, or be it a command, it matters not; for every command has a promise for its kernel. We are to go forward to obey His commands—forward to receive His promises—forward in faith—forward though difficulties double. Again, the foot dipped in the brimming waters declares emphatically that faith is to precede feeling. Nothing that we discover in heart or life need hinder

us in coming to Christ to seek deliverance from it. We may even use our worst discoveries as our plea in coming; "For the whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick." Nor will my sickness make the Physician displeased with me in my first application to Him. But if after He has healed me, and taught me the conditions of sustaining health, I find myself again unloving, cold, perturbed, fretted, moody, I have not the least right to say that all is well, and that, disregarding all this, I am to believe myself fully accepted through Christ. Unless I bring this disturbance to Him for confession, forgiveness, and healing, I am utterly at fault. Our feelings are of importance. The same Creator who set the faithful nerves as sentinels along all the lines of the senses, to give due warning of danger and disease, gave a corresponding sensitiveness to our souls. Faith is not to discharge this as unnecessary, but to retain it in her service. If it be well with our faith, it will also be well with our feelings. (*S. F. Smiley.*) *When does Divine help come?*—When we, actually going forth in duty as He has told us, according to the directions He has given, laying hold by faith upon His promise, come to the limit of our strength—when thus our feet are dipped in the brim of the waters of our Jordan, His great help does come. 1. Such Divine help comes in difficult duty. Though duty be difficult, when we go forth toward it, as God has ordered, and in faith in His promise, we may be certain somehow His help will meet us. 2. Such Divine help comes scattering foreboded inability, *e.g.*, the women going to the sepulchre, asking, anxiously, "Who shall roll away the stone?" but going on and finding it rolled away (Mark xvi. 1–4). 3. Such Divine help will come in death. See what Mr. Greatheart says of Mr. Fearing in the second part of "Pilgrim's Progress." The whole passage is most exquisite. 4. Such Divine help will also come in conversion. There is that Jordan of belief in Jesus—of the absolute commitment of the self to Him which we must pass before we can enter the Canaan of forgiveness, and God's favour, and the noble life. Now go on toward it. Cross it. But you have no feeling, you say; that is not to the matter. But you do not know such feeling as other people say they have; that is not to the matter. But you do not understand how it can be; you need not; that is not to the matter. But you are not fit to make the crossing; you never will be fitter; that is not to the matter. This is enough. God tells you to go forth, along His way in faith of His promise; and when your feet but touch the brim of a perfect self-surrender, you are His, you are Christian. His forgiveness falls, you have passed into the Canaan of the new life. (*W. Hoyt, D.D.*) *The ark in Jordan:*—It is worth noticing the use which in the passage of the river they made of the ark of the covenant. The pillar of fire had ceased to go before them. They had grown into the ability to appreciate a better and more spiritual symbolism. Fire meant more to the eye than a little box of acacia-wood, but the acacia box, considered as the casket of the Divine autograph of the two tables, denoted more to the mind and heart; and so it marks a growth that not the pillar, but the ark, guided them across the river. They treated the ark on this occasion reverently, but not superstitiously. They used it not as a "charm," but as a symbol. The Israelites on a later occasion used it as a charm in one of their battles with the Philistines, when after one defeat they said (1 Sam. iv. 3). To the men standing on the brink of the swollen Jordan, however, the ark was not a charm, a power, but only the representative of a power. Their own faith earned them miraculous passage, and not the little acacia chest; and they felt it so. There is danger of our coming to use the holy things of our religion more as the Israelites used the ark at Ebenezer than as they used it at the river. We easily fall into a way of attributing Divine potency to rites and ceremonies, prayers, sanctuaries, and ordinances, forgetting that these things are only types, significant as types, but not as forces—that the power of Christianity is not in the rites, but in the faith only that uses them. A symbol is a dangerous thing: the Hebrews learned that lesson at Ebenezer. A symbol is a precious thing: the Hebrews learned that lesson at the Jordan-crossing. (*C. H. Parkhurst, D.D.*) *Obeying God's commands:*—The Jordan of Canaan stands for any difficulty which the Lord commands us to encounter. Between us and the goal at which we are aiming, there is often some wide Jordan which, at the time, seems to us to be very peculiarly broad. At another time, when the stream is not so wide, we think that we might dare to make the attempt, but just now the thing seems too hazardous. We think we had better wait for a little, until the waters abate. So we stand on the brink shivering, and dare not plunge into the waves. How many a sinner has felt thus, as he has heard the call of God to forsake his sins! If only this or that

were a little different, he thinks he might venture, but just now the opportunity seems hardly propitious. To the believer the same temptation comes, as he faces some duty, and recognises that it is a duty, while yet he shrinks from it to-day. To-morrow, he argues, will be a more favourable season; and so he too refuses to step boldly into the flood. We all are inclined to ask that the billows may cease flowing before we are called to descend into their very midst. Is it not so? Let the example of this people, whom we have so often condemned with a kind of superior feeling of virtue, spur us to better ways of heeding the command of God. All that we need to be sure of is that we have the command of God. Sure of that, there is only one thing to be done by the believer, and that is to go ahead. If God says, "Go into the water, and when you get there the way will be made clear," we may be sure that in due time the waters will cease. Ours is to go ahead, and God's business is to see that the waters abate. If we do our part, we need not fear but what He will do His. "It is the first step that costs," is a proverb as true in religious matters as things secular. Many an undertaking that seemed impossible when we started has become very easy before we were done with it. Like the ten lepers who were told to go and show themselves to the priests before a spot of their leprosy had departed from them, but who as they went were cleansed, so it happens to the people of God: as they go, they receive the fulness of blessing, whereas had they waited for that until they were willing to start, they would have received nothing at all. How many blessings do you suppose you have failed to receive simply because you have refused to move until the whole way was made clear to you? You can at least go as far as the brink of the water, and even put your feet into the water, without being drowned. Why not try that much, and see what will happen? Is it not worth while? (*A. F. Schauffler, D.D.*)

VER. 14–17. **The priests . . . before the people.**—*Ministers as leaders of the people:*—It is not always that either priests or Christian ministers have set the example of going before in any hazardous undertaking. They have not always moved so steadily in the van of great movements, nor stood so firmly in the midst of the river. What shall we say of those whose idea, whether of Hebrew priesthood or of Christian ministry, has been that of a mere office, that of men ordained to perform certain mechanical functions, in whom personal character and personal example signified little or nothing? Is it not infinitely nearer to the Bible view that the ministers of religion are the leaders of the people, and that they ought as such to be ever foremost in zeal, in holiness, in self-denial, in victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil? And of all men ought they not to stand firm? Where are Mr. Byends, and Mr. Facing-Both-Ways, and Mr. Worldly-Wiseman more out of place than in the ministry? Where does even the world look more for consistency and devotion and fearless regard to the will of God? What should we think of an army where the officers counted it enough to see to the drill and discipline of the men, and in the hour of battle confined themselves to mere mechanical duties, and were outstripped in self-denial, in courage, in dash and daring by the commonest of their soldiers? Happy the Church where the officers are officers indeed! Feeling ever that their place is in the front rank of the battle and in the vanguard of every perilous enterprise, and that it is their part to set the men an example of unwavering firmness even when the missiles of death are whistling or bursting on every side. (*W. G. Blaikie, D.D.*) **As they that bare the ark were come unto Jordan.**—*The passage of the river Jordan:*—I. THAT WHATEVER DIFFICULTIES MAY ARISE IN THE CHRISTIAN'S PILGRIMAGE, THE MOST FORMIDABLE AWAITS HIM AT ITS CLOSE. Reserve, then, your resources. Do not waste your moral strength in a useless sighing over ills that are incident to human life, and which are blessings rather than curses if patiently borne. Remember that some really formidable obstacle may ere long be placed in your path, and that floods of suffering may be before you. The lesser troubles wisely borne will prepare you for greater ones—will teach you calmly to meet and eventually to triumph over them, as did the Israelites when, after encountering the perils of their desert-life, they came at length to "the swellings of Jordan." II. THAT GOD HAS PROVIDED APPROPRIATE MEANS BY WHICH THE DIFFICULTIES INCIDENT TO THE CHRISTIAN LIFE MAY BE OVERCOME. 1. He endows us with moral courage. Faith in God will give us firmness in times of danger; we shall be calm when others are agitated, and steadfast when others are moved. 2. He vouchsafes His gracious presence. And where God is there is peace and safety. Victory over temptation, comfort in trouble, support in death, all are insured by the presence of God. 3. He provides a guide. It was not

under Moses, but under Joshua, that the Israelites crossed the Jordan, yet all and more than Joshua was to the Israelites the Saviour is to us; going before to show us the way, encouraging us by His example and sustaining us by His grace. (*H. J. Gamble.*) *The crossing of the Jordan* :—Our subject brings before us a scene which in many of its features reminds us of that memorable night in which the Lord led Israel forth by that unexpected way, through the waters of the sea, from the house of bondage into liberty, from cruel slavery into the joy of a new national life. Now there is much to be learned from considering both the points of similarity and of contrast in those two memorable events. First we notice that in both cases there was a going down into the element of water, and a rising up out of it into an entirely new position—the mystical symbol of death, and burial, and of resurrection. In both cases by this passage through water a complete separation was effected between the old and the new state of things, and in both cases the passage indicated the commencement of a new and happy career. In each case the water, which naturally should have been an obstacle, became, we may say, an assistance, and that which naturally should have been a cause of danger became a means of safety. And in both cases this was caused by a distinct Divine intervention, and in each case that manifestation of supernatural power was associated with a symbol of the Divine presence, though the symbols in the two cases were different —in the first it was the fiery pillar, in the second it was the ark of the covenant. Nor are the points of contrast less striking than the points of agreement. The frenzied terror, the fearful excitement which pervaded that terrified multitude at the Red Sea is conspicuous by its absence on this occasion ; they are no longer fleeing from destruction and death, but passing on to a higher and happier kind of life. There they were passing from a fertile land into a howling desert, where they would have to depend on a miracle for every meal. Here they were passing from a waste of desert into a fertile land—a land that flowed with milk and honey. There we hear an outburst of triumphant enthusiasm when the sea was crossed, and loud songs of triumph rang forth from the vast multitude as the returning wave submerged the Egyptians. Here all seems to have been calm and solemn; the only expression of strong feeling was the setting up of those memorial stones as if a deep and lasting recollection of this great fact were aimed at rather than an evanescent excitement. In both cases, observe, we are contemplating a scene of salvation, yet is there a great difference between the salvation effected in the one case and in the other. In both cases the salvation comes through a divinely-appointed Saviour; but even between these there is a contrast. Moses was the Saviour from, Joshua was the Saviour into. And all this may throw much light upon a question that seems greatly to exercise the minds of some, especially just at present. It is unquestionably a fact that long after their conversion some Christians pass through an experience so marked and definite in its character, and leading to such happy and unmistakable consequences in their subsequent lives, that some teachers give to this great inward change the name of a second conversion. Others speak of it as entire sanctification, and urge upon all indiscriminately the necessity of passing through some such definite experience. Now two things are equally plain from this narrative. The first is, that the crossing of the Jordan did mark a very definite epoch in the history of the Israelites, and served to emphasise a crisis in their history, out of which they passed into a new and far more satisfactory condition. The second is, that this crossing of the Jordan, nevertheless, would not have been necessary at all but for the backsliding and perversity and unbelief of the Israelites. The lesson of Divine power exercised over the very elements, and over that element which, but for the intervention of an omnipotent hand, must have destroyed those whom it now protected, and the pledge that such a miracle contained for the future—all this would have been fresh in the minds of the Israelites when they first reached Kadesh-Barnea, and would have required no repetition. I was much struck with the remark of a dear friend of mine. Shortly after I had devoted myself entirely to mission work he said to me with great emphasis, "Now, my dear brother, you are going to give yourself up to the work of preaching the gospel, and I hope the Lord will give you many converts. But whatever you do, try and bring them in at Kadesh-Barnea; don't tell them that they've got to go wandering in the wilderness for forty years." I have never forgotten his words; and how I long for you young Christians who are just starting forwards from the Red Sea that you may be spared these forty years of weary wandering; that it should not be necessary for you to go on year after year murmuring over your doubts and fears, your disappointments

and your barrenness, your dulness and deadness, your infirmities and failures. Oh, it is weary work this! I pray you avoid it. We have seen that both the passage of the Red Sea and the passage of the Jordan were miracles of salvation wrought for Israel by God. We have also to notice that they are both instances of salvation by water. It is by God's judgment upon sin that we are to be saved from sin; by His judgment upon the world we are to be saved from the world. And now here lies our practical lesson. Whether we have been baptized at the moment of our conversion, and actually expressed our faith in Christ for justification in submitting to the ordinance, as probably was the case with St. Paul, or whether we are baptized in unconscious infancy before our faith became operative, as is usually the case with us Church-people, or whether we are baptized long after justification, as in the case with modern Baptists, we cannot become truly justified without passing through that which the ordinance symbolises—death and resurrection. Rise from the regrets of the past into the acquisitions of the future. Dry your tears, and claim your heritage. And here is the first step, "Sanctify yourselves: for to-morrow the Lord will do wonders among you." Sanctify yourselves. This is God's call to those of us who would fain cross over the Jordan. Put away every unclean thing—all that interferes with the Divine operation. And the next lesson is, expect! To-morrow the Lord will do wonders amongst you. Only by a miracle of grace can you be raised to your true level of Christian experience, and brought into the land that flows with milk and honey. Your heavenly Leader seems to ask, "Believest thou that I am able to do this?" Oh, let Him be answered from the bottom of your heart with a fervent "Yea, Lord; there is nothing too hard for Thee." Then comes the great fact, the pledge and presage of all coming victories: "Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you," &c. Go down again into the place of death and burial, but see your Lord there before you, a pledge that when you pass through the waters, because He is with thee, the floods shall not overflow thee. Go down into the place of judgment, and see thine old wilderness life, with all its waywardness and wilfulness, judged, condemned, and left behind thee for ever. (*W. Hay Aitken, M.A.*) *The ark and the crossing of Jordan*:—I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES AS CONNECTED WITH THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL. It does not appear that any intimation was given to the Israelites before the morning of the day on which they crossed the river as to the manner in which their passage was to be effected. This would be a great trial of their faith; and the readiness which they showed to go on when the ark did move was a clear proof that their faith, through the grace of God, stood the trial; and that they were actuated by simple trust in God, believing that whatever He said should be done would surely come to pass, however impossible it might seem to the judgment of men. The fact is that Israel had become accustomed to the constant exhibition of the most amazing miracles. They had been delivered from the bondage of Egypt by a succession of wonders. As our minds dwell on this strange sight, one object stands forth pre-eminently conspicuous, and that is the ark borne by the priests. The ark was the point round which all the glory of the miracle was made to revolve. As the people passed and gazed at the wall of waters, they would feel, we owe our safety and our easy passage to the presence of the ark, the token of the presence of Jehovah Himself. It will not be without instruction if we notice the name by which the ark was called in connection with the transaction before us: "the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God." Here, then, was a pledge of God's truth and faithfulness. He who was showing their way was one on whom they could thoroughly depend. How would this serve to stimulate them, to stir up their hearts, to awaken faith, to strengthen hope! Thus conspicuous was the ark on this most notable day. And if you ask why, the answer is twofold. First, because the ark was to remind them of the presence of God. By it He made to His people that most welcome of announcements, ever fresh: "I will dwell in them and walk in them, and they shall be My people, and I will be their God." The ark was also a type of Christ; and though Israel might not see the lessons which all the typical economy taught, yet God would magnify His Son by exalting that which pre-eminently represented Him. II. From the consideration of Israel LET US TURN TO OURSELVES, AND SEE WHAT IS TO BE GATHERED FROM THE HISTORY before us for instruction, comfort, and encouragement, as far as our own Christian life and practice are concerned. Is it not true that if we are among the spiritual Israel of God, experience of difficulty and trial is constantly falling to our lot? Now when we reflect on our necessities, cast our eyes around to survey our individual position, look onwards to the Canaan which we love, and think what we must encounter before its shore is reached, must we not have a guide and a defence?

Obstacles as great as Jordan with its overflowed banks and swollen stream meet us in our course; uncertainties in respect of which no calculation can, humanly speaking, be made, veil the future; intricacies which we cannot thread are constantly arising; enemies seem to stand upon the farther shore, and to threaten opposition and repulse even if we cross the stream. To-day all may be fair and smooth, to-morrow such a flood may arise of trouble, adversity, or temptation, as will be well-nigh sufficient to sweep us quite away. Well, let it be so. Believer, there is help for you which is all-sufficient. The ark is going before. Hear how the Lord speaks (Isa. xlii. 15, 16; xliii. 1, 2). Remember how you have been guided hitherto: how when you broke from the bondage of Satan and of sin, the Lord made a way through all that would have kept back your soul. If He of whom the ark was but a type, if Jesus be our guide, where may we not readily go? How precious is the word, "He goeth before them" (John x. 4). As we follow our heavenly Guide we may well believe that He leads us forth by the right way, that we may go unto a city of habitations. This is the glad portion of every one who lives the life of faith. He may thus individualise the covenant truth of God, and make it his own. But not only so, he can rest in the assurance that this covenant truth is the common heritage of all the saints, and so learn more and more to rejoice that all his brethren and sisters in Christ Jesus have the same guide, the same defence, the same refuge as himself. What a source of comfort is this; inexhaustible, overflowing, ever fresh and life-affording! (*C. D. Marston, M.A.*) *Jordan driven back:*—This was only one of several ways of entrance that might have been chosen; therefore this, the most unlikely of all, must have been chosen for special purposes. Nor are these difficult to find. I. By this wonderful entrance into the land JOSHUA WAS GREATLY HONOURED (ver. 7). It was a wonder wrought by Jehovah to establish the authority of Joshua. It was a fulfilling of the promise He had made, to be with him as He had been with Moses. It was an emphatic endorsement of the people's enthusiastic response. It was His own seal and signature placed upon Joshua's commission. Surely this was essential to united and effective action on the part of those he led. If men have no deep confidence in their commander, they cannot follow cheerfully, they cannot work heartily. Therefore, when God calls to office, He endows with all needful honour; and not only does He bestow it at the beginning, He also maintains it so long as He has work for His servants to do. Surely such a record as this should teach every servant of God to leave his honour in God's keeping. His one aim should ever be to honour God, knowing assuredly that that word of promise is never broken, "Them that honour Me I will honour." Yea, more than that, He will also cause others to do the same. II. Still further, we are told that by this miracle THE DIVINE PRESENCE WAS REVEALED (ver. 10). This wonder gave new proof of His guiding presence, and such an assurance was, in their present circumstances, peculiarly appropriate. The manna was about to cease. In like manner the beckoning banner of cloud and fire is furled for ever. No longer can it lead them forward, for their rest is gained. But if it has gone, Jehovah has not. His presence, though without that visible manifestation, is as real as ever. And it is as powerful; He is the living God, not dead like the idols of the Canaanites, or the ideas and abstractions of the philosopher, or the forces and atoms of the scientist. Neither is He inoperative; a worn-out energy, a decrepit force. He is acting everywhere, by all means, at all times. What a demonstration of these things was the working of this wonder. If it has been said of a great general that his presence with the army was worth a regiment, how much more would the assurance of the Divine presence strengthen every hero in Israel to chase a thousand foes. III. Again, by this miracle SUCCESS WAS GUARANTEED. After such a brilliant opening of the campaign, could there be an ignominious end? Impossible! He that did the greater wonder, would not fail in accomplishing the less. God never abandons His work half-way; He never leaves it marred or unfinished. IV. Among the results flowing from this wonder, not the least important was its influence on Israel's enemies. THE CANAANITES WERE TERROR-STRUCK (chap. v. 1). This great event, which filled the hearts of the Israelites with confidence, had just the opposite effect upon their enemies. Nothing could have dispirited them more. Who could stand against a people thus favoured? When God makes bare His arm the stoutest heart becomes like wax. All refuges of lies, every false security, is felt more frail than a gossamer web. (*A. B. Mackay.*) *The Jordanic passage:*—1. Standing on the scene of that affrighted and fugitive river Jordan, I learn that obstacles, when they are touched, vanish. It is the trouble, the difficulty, the obstacle there in the distance that seems so huge

and tremendous. 2. Again: this Jordanic passage teaches me the completeness of everything that God does. Does He make a universe, it is a perfect clock, running ever since it was wound up; fixed stars the pivots, constellations the intermoving wheels, and ponderous laws the weights and mighty swinging pendulum; the stars in the great dome striking midnight, and the sun with brazen tongue tolling the hour of noon. A perfect universe! No astronomer has ever proposed an amendment. Does God make a Bible, it is a complete Bible. Standing amid its dreadful and delightful truths, you seem to be in the midst of an orchestra, where the wailings over sin, and the rejoicings over pardon, and the martial strains of victory make a chorus like the anthem of eternity. Does God provide a Saviour; He is a complete Saviour. God—man. Divinity—humanity united in the same person. 3. Again, I learn from this Jordanic passage that between us and every Canaan of success and prosperity there is a river that must be passed. "Oh! how I should like to have some of those grapes on the other side," said some of the Israelites to Joshua. "Well," said Joshua, "if you want some of those grapes why don't you cross over and get them?" A river of difficulty between us and everything that is worth having. That which costs nothing is worth nothing. God makes everything valuable difficult to get at for the same reason that He puts the gold down in the mine, and the pearl clear down in the sea; it is to make us dig and dive for them. We acknowledge this principle in worldly things. Would that we were wise enough to acknowledge it in religious things. Eminent Christian character is only attained by Jordanic passage. No man just happens to get good. Why does that man know so much about the Scriptures? He was studying the Bible while you were reading a novel. He was on fire with the sublimities of the Bible while you were sound asleep. It was by tugging, and toiling, and pushing, and running in the Christian life that he became so strong. In a hundred Solferinos he learned how to fight. In a hundred shipwrecks he learned how to swim. Tears over sin, tears over Zion's desolation, tears over the impenitent, tears over graves, made a Jordan which that man had to pass. The other morning, seated at my table, all my family present, I thought to myself how pleasant it would be if I could put them all in a boat, and then get in with them, and we could pull across the river to the next world, and be there, and be there all together. But we cannot all go together; we must go one by one. What a heaven it will be if we have all our families there! Lord God of Joshua, give them safe Jordanic passage! Every Christian will go over dry-shod. One word of comfort from this subject for all the bereft. You see our departed friends have not been submerged, they have not been swamped in the waters; they have only crossed over. They are not sick, not dead, not exhausted, not extinguished, not blotted out; but with healthier respiration, and stouter pulsation, and keener sight, and better prospect, crossed over—their sins, their physical and mental disquietude all left on this side. Impassable obstacle between them, and all human and Satanic pursuit, crossed over. Would you have them back again? Would you have them take the risks and the temptations which threaten every human pathway? Would you have them cross Jordan three times—in addition to the crossing already—crossing again to greet you now, and then crossing to go back to heaven? (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *The passage of Jordan:*—Behold, in this passage of Jordan, first of all a picture of the beginning of the Christian's earthly course. As we stand where Israel stood, on the eastern bank, we behold a fair inheritance, a land flowing with milk and honey, rich with every earthly blessing, with all that heart could wish. But as between Israel and Canaan Jordan rolled, a great and immovable barrier, so between us and the goodly heritage of spiritual blessings we behold the swollen river of God's judgment against sin. How can we who are sinners enter into life and rest? How can we reach or enjoy such blessings? That barrier is to us unsurmountable. There are no fords in this river; and we cannot swim across it as the spies the Jordan. Neither is there any bridge above the waterflood. But look again. Behold a mighty wonder. That river is dried up and driven back. That barrier has been abolished, and the empty bed lies bare. It is as if there were no river. What has abolished the barrier? The ark of God alone. By means of it Jordan was driven back. And as the ark abolished the barrier between Israel and Canaan, so Christ has abolished death. He Himself, in His own body, has borne all the weight of the flood of God's judgment against sin. He has finished the work of salvation, and opened up a new and living way through His own body into the land of spiritual rest. He has done this, and done it alone. Of the people there was

none with Him. No hand of man had a share in this work, even as no man in Israel drove Jordan back. And Jesus abolished death as speedily and effectually as that flood was driven back. As it was with the priests in Jordan so was it with the great High Priest in the waters of judgment. Whenever the soles of His feet touched the brim of the deadly flood it fled away. He has put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. To those who trust in Him, so far as safety goes, it is as if it did not exist. Not the faintest trickle of condemnation can damp their feet. "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." Mark also how the passage was made by Israel. As it is written, "By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land"; so might it also be written of this twin event, "By faith they crossed the Jordan and entered into the inheritance of the Lord." By nought that we can do can we gain an entrance; but trusting in Him who has made an end of sin, we pass from death to life, from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God's dear Son. As Israel passed over Jordan by faith in God, even so must all pass from condemnation to acceptance, according to that word of the gospel, "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." And right gloriously is all such confidence justified, whether in the case of Israel or of any sinner that believes. Oh! how safe are they who put their trust in the living God, who enter into life by faith in Christ Jesus. The way of faith is absolutely safe for all who walk therein. And it is as simple as it is safe. The entrance into Canaan was the simplest, the easiest, the plainest, that could be devised. A little child could cross the emptied river as well as the stoutest warrior. And the stoutest warrior had to go the same way as the little child. It was a path that suited the feeblest, and therefore a path that suited the strongest; and no one could make any mistake about it; the wayfaring man, though a fool, could not err therein. Again, note that this way of entrance was free to all. No one was prevented from crossing. No charge was made for crossing. Whosoever would was welcome to enter in. The fact that the road lay open was an invitation for all to cross to the goodly land of rest. Even so, though the blessings of Canaan are not to be compared for a moment with the glory of God's inheritance of grace, still entrance into this heavenly rest is free. Without money, and without price, whosoever will may enter in. But we cannot conclude our consideration of this great event without pointing out its resemblance to that abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom, ministered to all those who with all diligence add to their faith courage, knowledge, temperance, godliness, brotherly kindness, love. The grace that led Israel through the wilderness for forty years; the grace that sustained their lives amid its barren sands; the grace that gave them bread from heaven and water from the flinty rock, did it fail them at the end of the journey? Nay! nay! The same power and love that had fed them with manna, and canopied them with cloud and flame, divided the waters of Jordan and gave them abundant entrance. This God remains our God for ever. His grace can never fail us. (*A. B. Mackay.*) The priests . . . stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan.—*The priests in the midst of Jordan; or, Moral firmness*:—Observe the sublime calmness of these priests—these leaders of the people; they stood firm in the midst of the waters till all passed over. The circumstances suggest two remarks about their firmness. I. THAT IT WAS RATIONAL IN ITS FOUNDATION. 1. It was not stolid indifference. 2. It was not confidence in their own power to keep back the mountain of water. 3. It was not, of course, faith in the laws of nature. These men were firm in defiance of nature's laws. 4. What, then, was the foundation of their firmness? The word of God. Now, our position is, that it is more rational to trust the word of God than the laws of nature. (1) Because His words bind Him to action; the laws of nature do not. (2) Because deviation from His word would be a far more serious thing to the universe, than deviation from the laws of nature. Were He to deviate from His word, virtue would be at an end, moral government would be disobeyed, the grand barrier between right and wrong, truth and error, heaven and hell, would be broken down; and anarchy and misery would deluge the moral creation. (3) Because He has departed from the laws of nature, but has never swerved an iota from His word. "Heaven and earth shall pass away," &c. 4. Two inferences necessarily flow from the foregoing considerations—(1) That it is more reasonable to walk by faith than by sight. (2) That apparent impossibilities can never be pleaded against Divine predictions. II. THAT IT WAS SALUTARY IN ITS INFLUENCE. 1. The force of human influence. The millions of every age follow the few. 2. The philosophy of useful influence. Fidelity to God is the spring of useful influence. (*Homilist.*)

No river there!—The dying words of Bishop Haven to the Rev. Samuel Upham, who went to see him, were, "Preach a complete gospel: a whole Christ, a whole heaven, a whole hell, the whole Bible from end to end." His physician on leaving said, "Good-night, bishop," and he answered, "Good-night: next time it will be 'Good-morning.'" Then he closed his eyes, and some thought the spirit had fled, but he opened them again, and, looking at the Rev. Mr. Mallalieu, said, "I have been looking for the cold river, but there is no river there; only a broad plain leading up to the throne." Soon afterwards his spirit crossed the "broad plain."

CHAPTER IV.

VERS. 1–24. **What mean ye by these stones?**—*The first act in Canaan:*—These stones proclaimed certain realities. Taken from the dry bed of the river, they declared God's power in cutting off the waters before the ark of His covenant; twelve in number, one stone for each tribe, they declared how that all Israel had entered into Canaan; set up together in Canaan, they witnessed to Israel's unity in that land. Moreover, they became a memorial to the nation of Jehovah's work for them. First, these stones declared Jehovah's great work for His people; even Jordan emptied of its waters before the ark of His covenant, and His people brought thereby into the fulness of their blessing. Now as we truly recognise that we are brought, in Christ, into the heavenly places, our first action in spirit will resemble that of Israel: we shall extol God for His power and might in accomplishing His purpose in bringing us into such blessing. Christ, our ark, went down into death for us, exhausted its power, stripped it of its might; and God has given us, who were dead in sins, life "together with" Christ risen from among the dead, and has set us in Him in the fulness of blessing, so that as truly as Israel through the passage of the Jordan were in Canaan, saints now are in Christ in the heavenly places. To enter into this grace, it is necessary to keep before our hearts, in faith, the measure of God's Divine power exercised towards us, the exceeding greatness of which is according to that energy and might of His "which He wrought," &c. (Eph. i. 20). And speaking in the language of the type under our consideration as "clean passed over" Jordan, the Christian's first act should be the heart recognition of what God has done. We are across the river; to God through Christ be the praise. Next, the stones, twelve in number, "according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel" (vers. 5, 8), spoke of the whole of Israel. Christians occupy themselves practically with spiritual, not national, unity; therefore with the truth that all saints of every nation are one in God's sight and according to His purpose. Saints are seated together in the heavenly places in Christ, the one common place of blessing for all who believe. One association and one privilege mark all saints, and all equally have the highest and the best place. Even as each individual believer has life for himself "together" with Christ risen (Eph. ii. 5), so have all believers the highest privileges in common; they are by God made "to sit together" (Eph. ii. 6). The pillar of twelve stones, set up in Gilgal, became a memorial to the nation of Jehovah's work for them. The question, "What mean ye by these stones?" which the children would ask their fathers was to be answered by a relation of the Lord's doings. And well indeed may Christians recount to their children what God has wrought. Our little ones should be grounded in the great truths of God's Word. Redemption, resurrection, and ascension facts should be implanted in their minds and memories. (*H. F. Witherby.*) *The pile of stones speaking:*—It is an outrage to build a house like this, occupying so much room in a crowded thoroughfare, and with such vast toil and outlay, unless there be some tremendous reasons for doing it; and so I demand of all who have assisted in the building of this structure: "What mean ye by these stones?" 1. We mean that they shall be an earthly residence for Christ. Jesus did not have much of a home when He was here. Oh, Jesus! is it not time that Thou hadst a house? We give Thee this. Thou didst give it to us first, but we give it back to Thee. It is too good for us, but not half good enough for Thee. 2. We mean the communion of saints. 3. We mean by these stones the salvation of the people. We did not build this church for mere worldly reforms, or for an educational institution, or as a platform on which to

read essays and philosophical disquisitions; but a place for the tremendous work of soul-saving. Do not make the blunder of the ship carpenters in Noah's time, who helped to build the ark, but did not get into it. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *Stones buried and raised:*—I. These stones were most emphatically A MONUMENT OF GREAT MIGHT. The hand of man is capable of great achievements. How stupendous, how unparalleled, was the work of carrying Israel across Jordan in this fashion; yet how easily, how quickly, how quietly, was it all done! II. Yet these stones formed A MONUMENT THAT MIGHT BE DESPISED. Simple and rude it was; it had no beauty or architectural comeliness, to be desired; it was nothing more than a rough pyramid of twelve muddy stones. With what contempt would an Egyptian look down upon it. But, after all, ostentation is human, simplicity is Divine; for though, from a human point of view, the wonder commemorated here was very great, what was it from the Divine? Nothing. What, after all, was the opening up of this passage to Him who upholds all things by the word of His power, who gathers the waters in the hollow of His hand, who taketh up the isles as a very little thing? Nothing, and less than nothing. It was easy for the men of Israel to raise such a monument. Yes; yet it was harder for them to heap up these stones than for God to heap up these waters; and all the might that reared the pyramids could never have congealed these depths. III. Again, THIS MONUMENT HAD A WORLDWIDE REFERENCE AND A SPECIAL APPLICATION. Most monuments have a very restricted reference. They speak to a political or a religious community; to the inhabitants of a city or the natives of a country, or to the members of a common faith; but this simple monument on Jordan's bank has a voice for all mankind. It gives a declaration of God's mighty power, so clear and emphatic that if men do not hear its testimony it is because they have stopped their ears. And if it had, for the human race as a whole, a great lesson to teach, it was fraught with special instruction to the Israel of God. To all men it cried, "God is mighty"; to Israel it testified, "This God abides thy God for evermore." He is your refuge and strength. Therefore this monument was set up that they might remember and fear the Lord for ever and walk in His ways, and do His commandments. IV. OTHER LESSONS ARE TAUGHT BY THESE STONES. They were twelve in number, arranged in their places by twelve warriors, one from each tribe; therefore it is plain that the whole people are represented by these stones. Also there were two sets of twelve stones: one set in the bed of the river, buried by its waters; another raised from the bed of the river, and piled upon its bank. Therefore we have here the whole people represented in two different aspects. The twelve buried stones speak of Israel in one relation; the twelve raised in another. Think of the buried. What mean ye by these stones? They lie on the bottom of the river, covered by its muddy waters. They represent God's chosen people, for they are twelve. The strange place, therefore, in which they lie, must be a representation of some spiritual and important truth concerning Israel. What is it? "By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." The death of those who came out of Egypt made this very plain. Now the children have arisen in place of the fathers, and they are about to enter in. What is their title to the inheritance? Is it better than that of their fathers? Is it true that they are worthy; that they have clean hands and a pure heart, and have not lifted up their souls unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully? Is it true that they are righteous? Can they claim entrance because of their obedience to the law? Nay, by the law shall no man be justified; and this burying of the twelve stones most solemnly emphasises this declaration. "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven." The sinner must leave the old man behind; the body of sin must be destroyed; we must be born again ere ever we see or enter into the kingdom of God. Do we ask, where is the old man, the body of sin? The Cross and grave of Christ give answer: it is gone, clean gone for ever; lost sight of, as these stones in the bed of Jordan. They are buried, to know no resurrection; yea, God tells us He has cast them behind His back, into the depths of the sea, a far deeper grave than Jordan. Through Alaric I. the Goths first learned the way to Rome. He and his rugged hosts were everywhere invincible. All Italy, luxurious and effeminate, lay at his feet. He extended his conquest as far south as Sicily. But at Cosenza in Calabria he was seized with a deadly malady. When he died, his followers had to face a great difficulty. What were they to do with the dead body of their great leader? It was impossible to carry it back over Italian plain and snowy Alp to the dark forests of his fatherland. It dare not be left to the mockery and desecration of the caitiffs he had conquered. Therefore they determined to

bury it in the bed of the river Busento. They set their captives to the task of diverting the stream from its channel, and there in its dry bed they dug the grave of Alaric. Then, when he was buried deep in his rocky tomb, and the waters rolled once more in their wonted channel, to hide for ever the secret of this strange sepulchre, all the captives were put to death. These Goths wished to give their king a grave which no hand could reach. Even such a grave has God given our sins, and here in these stones we behold a picture of what He has done. We are buried with Christ. Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin but alive unto God by Christ Jesus our Lord. But there were twelve stones raised upon the bank as well as twelve buried in the bed of Jordan, and we may well ask, "What mean ye by these stones?" This is the positive side of the same truth we have been considering. As the buried stones speak of death, so the raised speak of resurrection. We are not only buried with Christ, but are also quickened with Him, raised with Him, and seated with Him in heavenly places. The twelve buried stones picture our place on account of sin; the twelve raised declare our place on account of righteousness. The first speak of weakness; the second of might. The one declares all "old things are passed away"; the other, "all things are become new." These twelve stones set on Jordan's bank were raised from Jordan's bed. That river, as it were, begot them. They were of it, from it, out of it. Even so the Church of Christ is begotten and brought forth from His death. The agonies of Christ crucified were the travail pangs of the new creation. As His people are buried with Him, so are they quickened, "begotten again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Christ from the dead." Yes, it is a "lively hope." The great pyramid of Egypt was after all a monument of despair, "the eternal abode" of the dead. This little pyramid of Canaan is a pyramid of hope, placed in the goodly land conspicuously and permanently; reminding those that believe that we are not only raised with Christ, but seated with Him in heavenly places—that we are henceforth a constituent part of His inheritance. (*A. B. Mackay.*) *Voiceful stones:*—This primitive form of a memorial is common to almost all nations. Of this character are the Egyptian obelisks and the cairns and the Druidical circles in England and Scotland. The text is the question of the children. The sight of the cairn would awaken curiosity. It has been well asked, "What child in Altorf but must have inquired respecting the statue of William Tell, or in Lucerne about the lion sculptured by Thorwaldsen to commemorate the deaths of the Swiss Guard?" These memorial stones would remind the tribes of God's greatness and goodness. But the stones must have tongues in order that their testimony may be more complete. They were not simply to be memorial; they were also to be declaratory. . . . Occupying to-day for the first time this place of worship, it is fitting that we should ask and answer the old question, "What mean ye by these stones?" The form which the stones have taken partly answers the question. Turret, tower, and spire point heavenward. In its symmetry and sincerity the whole structure preaches the need of truth in the heart and life. 1. These stones express our conviction of the world's need of Christ's gospel. Sin is the terrible fact in human existence. It is the absence of wholeness and of happiness; of Godlikeness here, and of heaven hereafter. It has separated man from God, and man from man. It is the prolific parent of all our woes. In the fulness of time the Christ was born. One element, the negative element, in that fulness was the world's fruitless effort to help itself. Mighty Rome, in her abject helplessness, was calling for a deliverer. Beautiful Greece was stretching out her hands for a healer. Christ was both to both so far as they received Him. The experience of the world must be that of each individual. God says, and experience echoes the saying, "Thou hast destroyed thyself." Thank God He speaks this other word: "But in Me is thy help." 2. These stones express our faith in Christ's gospel to meet the world's need. To each man, guilty and condemned, it offers, through the death and mediation of Christ, a full and free pardon. It makes the redeemed here have foretastes of heaven. It harmonises all the conflicting interests of human society. 3. These stones declare our faith in and our duty toward the aggressive, the missionary side of Christ's gospel. It means to conquer the world. It will do it. This is its lofty ambition and its Divine destiny. In this respect it stands unique among the religions of the world. We are not to satisfy ourselves by singing, "Hold the fort!" we must shout, "Storm the fort!" Our anti-mission Church is an anti-Christian Church. 4. These stones declare our faith in our distinctive organic order as a body of Christians, as being in harmony with Christ's gospel. (*R. S. MacArthur.*) *Stones of memorial:*—I. THE MEMORY OF

GOD'S GOODNESS IS HONOURING TO GOD HIMSELF. To receive favours from an earthly friend, and then to forget them, and to act as if they had never been bestowed; this is ingratitude, base and contemptible. How much worse is the conduct of those who are insensible to and negligent of the favours shown by God to man! Especially should redemption wrought by the Son of God be kept in everlasting remembrance. The least we can do is to praise and glorify the God of grace. II. THE MEMORY OF GOD'S GOODNESS IS A STIMULUS TO PIETY. Remembrance feeds the flame of devotion, of love, of trust. To think of God's favours and to be thankful is "a good thing," is profitable to the spiritual life, and conducive to fellowship with God, and to true happiness and contentment. III. THE MEMORY OF GOD'S GOODNESS IS AN ENCOURAGEMENT IN TIME OF TRIAL, DANGER, AND FEAR. The distressed and harassed may well call to mind the Divine interpositions of the past, which will lead them to exclaim: "The Lord hath been mindful of us: He will help us." (*Family Churchman.*) *The memorial stones:*—I. WHAT WAS GOD'S PURPOSE? 1. The memorial was to be an aid to faith. 2. It had the purpose of cherishing gratitude. 3. It was a reminder of the need of unity. II. WHAT ARE THE PROPHETIC ASPECTS OF THIS MEMORIAL? 1. The two piles of stones, according to St. Augustine, represent the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles; the new Israel on the bank of the old river, the old in the midst of the stream, as the "buried" past. Thus the "memorial" is the Church of Christ, built upon the apostles, the one Divine Society, which is founded on a Rock, and against which the gates of hell may beat, but cannot prevail; for it is a memorial "for ever." 2. As the passage of the Red Sea represents baptism—God "safely led the children of Israel Thy people through the Red Sea, figuring thereby Thy holy baptism" (Prayer Book)—so some writers have seen in the crossing of Jordan a figure of the pardon for sins committed after baptism; in other words, an image of repentance. Further, as after passing Jordan, the Passover was kept, so after repentance the Holy Communion is received. In fact, the memorial as to its purposes may be compared to the Holy Eucharist; that is, a "memorial" of the death and passion of Christ: "Do this, for My memorial"; it is the great service of thanksgiving for redemption, as its name announces; and it is a pledge of unity, for "we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one Bread" (1 Cor. x. 17). 3. Further, as through Jordan the Hebrews entered the land of promise, the "Holy Land," so penitence must be introductory to a holy life, which leads to heaven. 4. It may be noticed that by some modern writers Jordan is regarded as the river of death, and the words, "How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" (Jer. xii. 5) to be applicable to the fears which surround death, through which all must pass before they can "see the kingdom of God." III. LESSONS. 1. To sustain our faith by the use of those "outward and visible" signs —the Sacraments, which our Lord has appointed as the memorials of what He has wrought for us. 2. To make our lives more lives of thanksgiving, and especially by receiving the Holy Eucharist, which is the "thanksgiving" which Christ ordained to be offered up to the end of time, "till He come" (1 Cor. xi. 26). 3. Further, let the twelve stones remind us of the union which should exist between the members of Christ; for whilst we are bidden to "honour all men," the apostle says further, "love the brotherhood." 4. The cairn of stones at Gilgal should teach us that we "as lively stones are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood," &c. (1 Pet. ii. 5). The truest witness to Christ is to be found in the lives of His members, those who make Him visible. To such, the power which made a way for Israel through Jordan will not fail them, and the promise will be fulfilled by the Saviour (Isa. xliii. 2). (*Canon Hutchings.*) *Memorials:*— I. THAT THE SPIRITUAL LIFE SHOULD BE ONE OF CONTINUED MEMORIALS. Is it not one continued course of mercies? And as these mercies, these proofs of love and care telling sweetly of the provision of a Father, the grace of a Saviour, the presence of a Comforter, are manifested day by day and hour by hour, what cry so fitting as that of the Psalmist, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits"? How delightful to look back and trace the dealings of God with your soul; or, not confining the mind to spiritual things, to see how, at times, especial providences have fallen out, telling of unceasing watchfulness on the part of the Lord, and calling for devout acknowledgment on yours. How delightful to find that you have not overlooked these signs of goodness, but that they still live fresh in loving recollection, and that here on earth those things are not forgotten which assuredly will furnish themes of praise hereafter in heaven. It has been so all along. Observe Abraham on mount Moriah; Jacob on the plain by Luz; Moses after Israel's defeat

of Amalek at Rephidim; Samuel when the Philistines had fled before him; look at the children of Israel here at Gilgal; the same Spirit moves them all. II. IT IS USEFUL TO CONSIDER WHAT WE SHOULD COMMEMORATE, AND THE MANNER IN WHICH SUCH COMMEMORATION SHOULD BE OBSERVED. We might speak of national mercies, and mercies to our Church; of signal benefits, such as our pure creed, our heritage of the Word of God, the opening of wide fields for Christian enterprise, the revival of the spirit of religion, which, a century ago, made England see a wondrous resurrection from spiritual death, and which is still manifesting itself in a thousand forms for the good of man. Such things as these call for deep thankfulness. The Christian community which can recount them may appropriate the language (Psa. lxxviii. 1–7). But just in proportion as thankfulness fills the individual heart will the general mind of the community feel its expanding power. The revival of God's work in this, as in other respects, must begin in the individual, and the community will take its tone from the majority. And if we learn to value for ourselves, by personal participation, the blessings of the gospel of Christ Jesus, we are prepared to appreciate the benefit which those blessings confer on the community: if we really set up our memorials for saving mercy conferred on ourselves, the Divine goodness shown to our nation and our Church will not readily be overlooked. III. WHY IT IS DESIRABLE TO ACT IN THE WAY THAT HAS BEEN POINTED OUT. We are prone to look rather at our sorrows than at our joys; to brood over trouble rather than to be grateful for prosperity. Poor complaining souls, take heed lest you rebuke God. Look on the other side. Try to count your mercies. "My mercies." Yes! The help God has given you over and over again; the difference which you may find between your trials, which are so great, and those of your neighbour, which are even greater; the patience and long-suffering with which God has borne all your repining, your murmuring, your forgetfulness of Him, your doubts and fears and unbelief; the grace which has spared you instead of cutting you off in sin and casting you down to hell; the rich privileges and means of spiritual good brought to your very door and placed within your reach, set by your side from time to time, with merciful perseverance and consideration for your soul. Let us be well assured that if we kept these things more in remembrance the spiritual life of the people of God would flourish and abound to an extent as yet not generally seen. 1. There would be more gratitude. Fresh exercises of praise would spring from hearts whose thankfulness would be from time to time more specially revived. 2. There would be more hope. As desires after mercies might arise, they would not be vague, but accompanied by well-grounded expectations based on the past experience of so many mercies remembered. 3. There would be more faith. When dark clouds gather we should see the light streak where they would ere long break, the golden fringe to show that the sun is still there. We should feel that these shadows shall be dissipated as others have been. 4. There would be more happiness. Where gratitude and hope and faith abide, repining and doubt can find no room. (*C. D. Marston, M.A.*) *Memorials:* — Memorials! What are they? For what do they stand, and what do they teach? They are special signs of Divine interposition in human lives, and commemorate some event or circumstance claiming special remembrance and study. I. THIS MEMORIAL WAS COMMEMORATIVE AND SUGGESTIVE. 1. It commemorated a new departure. They had not been this way before, they had never stood so near the fulfilment of hope as they did now. This is typical of every life. We all have our new departures, times of marked and decisive change, when some sudden bend in the road completely changes the track, leads us into new scenes of activity or rest, giving us new revelations and new experiences, and are truly periods of deep interest, epochs, red-letter days in our lives; we cannot forget them, and have raised memorials marking them as points to be remembered and studied. 2. It commemorated a signal mercy. Every Christian life has its seasons of peculiar need, which are often made special means of grace. And should he not raise memorials to mark both the trial and the mercy? 3. It commemorated a remarkable deliverance. What a sublime spectacle! When all human aid is unavailing, and nothing can save but direct Divine intervention, then Jehovah commands the waters to stand up upon a heap, again showing His salvation to His people. Some such memorial you have in your life. Some time of pressing need, when human help failed, and God came to your deliverance by opening up a path through the deep waters for you. And have you made no mark, no sign, put up no lasting reminder? II. THE VALUE OF SUCH MEMORIALS. 1. They witness for God. They stand at different points on the ways of life, bearing silent but telling testimony to the power and grace of the Infinite Father in some time of

sore and pressing need, confirming our faith in the doctrine of the conscious, abiding, personal presence of God in the lives of His people. 2. They remind us of mercies received in the past. We are consciously faulty in memory, are apt to forget the blessings already received, and to grow impatient and fretful when things are a little contrary; then it is of service to us to go back a little in our history to some of these times of God's special nearness to us, when He gave us such unmistakable proof of His presence and grace by some marked deliverance, some special blessing, or some signal answer to prayer; when we can refresh our faulty memories by putting our hand upon some place, or time, or event in our life that we had marked by a stone of memorial, as a record of faith in God and gratitude to Him. 3. They inspire confidence and hope for the future. Much was before them to perplex. 4. They check despondency and gloom. 5. They supply precious lessons of Divine faithfulness. God would have us raise these memorials by the way to remind us of His covenant engagements. The past shall repeat itself in our future. 6. These memorials are of service to others. The pillar at Gilgal was not only to be a memento of the sovereign mercy of God to those who had actually witnessed the cutting off of the waters of Jordan, but it was to supply to posterity some precious lessons of Divine majesty and love. Much so it is with the memorials of Christian lives—they exert a helping influence on other lives. 7. These memorials supply incentives to increased devotion, and stimulate to loftier praise. In this day of scepticism, coldness, indifference, and practical infidelity, when the actual presence of God in individual lives is more or less ignored, it is both refreshing and reassuring to take up Christian biography and hear how the holy men and women who have passed into the Father's house accounted for similar events in their lives. I have sometimes seen family Bibles marked with peculiar hieroglyphics which a stranger could not read or understand; but ask the husband or wife to tell you what these marks mean, and you will find that each has a history precious and sweet to the marker. They are pillars that have been raised to remind them of some special answer to prayer, when they pleaded that promise; or when some extraordinary light broke upon the mind, on a certain day, as they pondered and prayed over that verse; or perhaps it was a literal fulfilment of another promise on which they had rested in a time of distressing calamity, and they have placed these memorials there to call to mind the signal mercy of God in their time of urgent need, and they would as soon doubt the need as they would the source of supply. "God did it for us," they say, "as surely as He divided Jordan for Israel to pass over to Canaan." I have also heard matured Christian men converse together on God's dealings with them, and have felt a strange thrill pass through me as one of them has put his hand upon some pillar in his life and said, "Here God met me, and I communed with Him. It was a time of bitter pain and need, and I was bowed down to earth with the burden, and was fainting by the wayside, but the Lord drew very near, and I seemed to hear His voice speaking to me, and asking me to tell Him about the pain, and I was drawn out to tell Him all, and He blessed me there, by giving in a way marvellous to me just what I needed; I rose up a strong man, and the grace was so like a miracle that I put up this memorial, and this spot is very dear to me, for here I saw God face to face and my life is preserved." (*J. Higgins.*) *The stones buried in the Jordan*:—As a memorial of this wonderful passage, twelve stones were selected from the rocky bed of the river, one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel; and these were borne across before them on the shoulders of twelve men, and planted on the upper terrace of the valley beyond the reach of the annual inundation. In this manner was formed the first sanctuary of the Holy Land, which was a circle of upright stones—like one of the so-called Druidical circles in which our pagan ancestors worshipped in our own country. But besides this memorial which was set up on the western bank of the Jordan, there was another set up in the bed of the river itself. In the place where the feet of the priests who bore the ark of the covenant stood, in the centre of the channel, twelve stones like those which had been carried across to the opposite bank were arranged probably in the same manner; and when the river, which had been temporarily driven backwards to allow the Israelites to cross, returned to its forsaken bed, its dark, muddy waters flowed over the buried stones and hid them for ever from view. Thus there were two monuments of the miraculous passage of the Jordan taken from the materials of its own bed; one that gave rise to the sacred shrine of Gilgal, which was for a long time the appointed place of worship in the land; and another that was buried out of sight for ever in the muddy ooze of the deep rushing river. The

sacred narrative tells us what were the purpose and meaning of the monument that stood on the dry land and was visible to every eye; but we have to find out what were the purpose and meaning of the monument that was invisible beneath the waters of the river. The place where they entered the Holy Land is unique. There is no other place like it in the world. It is the deepest chasm on the surface of the earth—at a great depth below the level of the sea. Do we not see in this circumstance a symbol of the deep repentance and self-abasement which a people so sensual, so ignorant, required before they could be fitted to occupy the heights of worship in God's holy heritage? Then look further at the fact that the time when the Israelites crossed the Jordan was the spring-time, which in Palestine is the commencement of the barley-harvest. We are told elsewhere in Scripture that the harvest is emblematical of the judgment. It was therefore a time of judgment when the Israelites crossed the river; their past sins, their numerous rebellions, and outbursts of unbelief, deserved condemnation and punishment; their iniquities rose up against them, and demanded their exclusion from the land of promise as unworthy. But God in His great mercy held back the waters of the Jordan, the waters of judgment and death, which would otherwise have overwhelmed them, whilst His holy ark stood in the midst of the stream, and Israel crossed in safety; a token surely that though He was angry with them, His anger had passed away, and He was about to give them double for all their sins. Look further still at the significant fact that when the Israelites had erected their first sanctuary on the other side of Jordan, on the soil of the Holy Land, which by this solemn act became their own inheritance, they were immediately circumcised, and thus consecrated anew to the Lord, made new creatures, as it were, from their birth to Him. So that we see in this incident, as well as in the circumstance that the older generation which had left Egypt all perished in the wilderness, and only their children entered the Holy Land, what we may regard as the origin and illustration of our Lord's saying, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye cannot enter the kingdom of heaven." Seeing, then, that all the incidents and circumstances of the passage of the Israelites across the Jordan form a very focus of symbolism, we are surely warranted in looking for a spiritual significance in the burying of the memorial stones in the bed of the river. The Jordan was a boundary river, separating between the wilderness and the promised land. It flowed down to the dreary, lifeless solitude of the Dead Sea. Its waters, laden with mud, were dark and drumly, and concealed their bed and whatever they flowed over completely. Its course also was very rapid and impetuous. In all these respects it was a most expressive symbol to the Israelites. The transition from the wilderness to Canaan was not made over continuous dry land; a water-boundary was interposed, through which they had to pass. And did not this teach them that in the passage from the wandering life of the desert to a settled home in the land of promise they were not to continue the same persons in the new circumstances that they had been in the old; but, on the contrary, were to undergo a moral change, a spiritual reformation. They were to be made a holy nation, in order to be fit occupants of the Holy Land. Their passage of the Jordan was therefore a baptism of repentance; the river at the entrance of the Holy Land, like the laver at the entrance of the tabernacle, afforded a bath of purification; and the memorial stones laid in the bed of the river, over which the waters, when they had safely crossed on dry land, returned, burying them for ever from sight, represented the fate which should have been theirs had God dealt with them according to their sins. And just as the scape-goat carried away the sins of the people, confessed on its head, into the wilderness, into a land of forgetfulness, so the dark, muddy waters of the Jordan carried away the stones which represented the sins of the Israelites into the Dead Sea, there to be engulphed for ever. All baptism is in a spiritual sense the crossing of a boundary. When a child is baptized it crosses a boundary between nature and grace—between ignorance and knowledge. And when in later life we are baptized with a spiritual baptism, born again of water and the Spirit, we cross the boundary between spiritual death and life—from the kingdom of Satan to that kingdom which is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Now the river of baptism is a river of death. In crossing it we die to sin and live to righteousness. In entering into the new life the old life perishes. Through the death of the old man there is the resurrection of the new man. All that is connected with the old life of sin and unbelief is taken from us and carried down to the Dead Sea. The body of sin is drowned in the waters of forgiveness, and shall no more rise up against us. Like the stones in the bed of the Jordan, there is no resurrection for that which

was connected with our former dead sinful selves. And how precious is the significance of the buried stones when looked at in this light! It is not a truth that pleases the intelligence by its ingenuity only; it is a truth that satisfies the heart by its suitableness to its wants. How comforting and reassuring is the thought that when, through faith in Christ, we have crossed from a state of nature to a state of grace, all our sins are cast into the sea of God's mercy. They are as completely buried out of sight as the stones in the ooze of the Jordan. The peace that is like a river and the righteousness that is like the waves of the sea flow over them. (*H. Macmillan, D.D.*) *The witness of the stones*:—1. They were stones of witness, for in after-years they powerfully proclaimed that the miracle of dividing the water of the Jordan was true, since they were raised at the very time; they were erected publicly in the sight of the people, and no one would have dared to make such a monument, and to declare that it commemorated such an event, had the miracle never taken place. Scripture miracles are attested by witnesses, which attestation distinguishes them from the so-called miracles of the heathen world. 2. And the stones of Gilgal were stones of encouragement, for when Israel looked on them, and recollected that they recalled God's power, no doubt could be felt that God was able to make their enterprise a success. When the great cities, vast wealth, and mighty armies of the Canaanites were considered, many a Hebrew might feel his heart sink within him as he looked on the rude and undisciplined host which Joshua had led across the Jordan. But a glance at the stones of the circle of Gilgal would dispel all such fears, and he would think—"The mighty Jehovah who divided the waters of Jordan is on our side; and against the power that cleft asunder the waves of that river what can the might of the Amorites avail? Jehovah is with us, and against Him whose word divided Jordan vain is the power of the Canaanite, and our victory is absolutely sure." 3. But while these stones gave encouragement to Israel, they bore witness in a different manner to their enemies, for to the Canaanites they were stones of warning. How could Amorite or Hittite withstand invaders whose God possessed the power of dividing the waters of Jordan? They had run riot in sin; they had stifled conscience: they had despised warning; and now the day of mercy was past, and the avengers were upon them, and who could hope to resist their power and to escape their swords, when their God made the waters of Jordan to stand as a heap in the day when His people passed over? Sin will not go for ever unpunished; God's Spirit shall not always strive with man, and corruption shall not with impunity defile the fairest portions of a groaning creation: but when the day of grace has passed, the day of vengeance shall certainly follow. The stones in Gilgal are gone, the circle is destroyed, and the stony witness of encouragement and warning is no longer borne; but there are stones around us now which give their witness, and our ears must be heavy if we do not hear, and our minds dull if we do not understand, the testimony that they deliver. "What mean these stones?" 1. They show God's power; for who could make such mighty foundation rocks, and after their formation could heave them up into their present lofty heights, but a Being possessed of almighty power? 2. What wisdom, too, is exhibited in their formation! What a wonderful skill is shown in the selection of their constituent elements, and in their combination according to a fixed design! 3. And what goodness also do these stones of the hills manifest? for how useful they are to man, and how it stimulates his inventive faculty to quarry, shape, and erect them as monuments to beautify the creations of his genius! Man puts up milestones to measure the length of his journey, and God also erects milestones to mark how man himself is advancing on that journey which we are all travelling. What is our life but a journey? ever advancing and ceaselessly progressing day by day, month by month, and year by year. Life's journey is to many painful and wearisome. The morning of life, with its freshness, is gone; the noonday sun beats fiercely on our heads; the novelty of changing experiences has passed away; and as we slowly advance along the highway of daily life, our hearts begin to get weary, and we too become discouraged "because of the way." God puts up His milestones to mark our progress on life's journey, and as we pass them successively, it is solemn to notice their witness and their character. The eyesight begins to grow dim: slowly, indeed, but surely; and we treat the fact almost with indifference. It is a mere common event, but it is another milestone on the road of life, to show that the end will before long draw near. The hearing is dulled. Pleasant sounds can no more be enjoyed, and the harmonies of nature's and of human music gratify us no longer. We quietly accept the inevitable, perhaps with a sigh, but at all events with resignation, knowing that it must be so; and in the

heavy ear we recognise another of God's milestones. Memory now begins to fail. We cannot trust it as formerly, and do not attempt to tax its power for fear that it should prove treacherous. Failing, capricious memory! what is it but another milestone placed by God by the side of the road of life to tell us that we have passed over the greater part of our journey and are drawing near to home? The milestones of the way, how differently they affect different people! Here is a man going away from his country, seeking his place of abode in a distant land, and leaving behind him all he holds dear in this world: his lands, his treasures, and his friends. Milestones are sad things to him, for they tell him that his time in the land in which all his pleasure is found is rapidly passing away. But here is another man, returning to his home. He has been in a foreign land; has made his fortune: has landed on his return at the well-known port, and is journeying rapidly along the highroad to his loved and long-expected home. He knows a welcome is there: dear ones are all looking out for his arrival, and his greeting will be joyous, while he will not merely meet them, but will never leave them again. How quickly he walks! How slowly the milestones seem to pass! The heat of the sun, the length of the way, the ups and downs of the road, are all nothing to him, for the thought of the home ever drawing nearer and nearer makes him take no notice of them whatever. So it should be with us. We have had, perhaps, our morning of life, and it may be that the journey is beginning to grow wearisome; but let us think less of the road and more of the home. (*D. G. Whitley.*) **The priests . . . stood . . . until everything was finished.**—*The way of difficulty*:—I. REMEMBRANCE OF GOD IS THE ONLY ENCOURAGEMENT THROUGH WHICH SOME PARTS OF LIFE'S WAY BECOME BEARABLE AND PASSABLE. II. GOD'S REGARD TO THE GREATER TRIALS OF OUR LIFE DOES NOT CALL OFF HIS ATTENTION FROM DETAILS. He not only parted the waters, but He waited in the river, both in power and presence, "until everything was finished." III. THE GENERAL COMMANDMENTS OF THE BIBLE ARE MEANT TO REGULATE AND CONTROL THE SPECIFIC ACTS OF OUR LIFE. "According to all that Moses," &c. But Moses had never given any commands touching the actual passage of the Jordan. Yet Moses had commanded an implicit reliance on Divine guidance and a careful obedience to Divine requirements. Such general words covered all the particulars of the case. There are many things in the family, in business, in the Church, and in the world, which no specific precept may touch; there is absolutely no place which we can occupy in our daily life which in principle and in spirit is not covered by the Scriptures. IV. WHILE DIVINE PATIENCE NEVER WEARIES IN GIVING US NECESSARY HELP, WHEN GOD GOES BEFORE WE SHOULD PROMPTLY FOLLOW. "The people hasted and passed over." Whatever motive actuated their haste, haste was the right thing for the time. God does not work that we may idly look on. His manifest energy is a call for our marked diligence (2 Sam. v. 24). V. GOD, WHO MAKES WAY IN THE VAN OF OUR DIFFICULTIES, IS NO LESS NECESSARY TO SECURE OUR REAR (ver. 11; Deut. xxv. 17, 18). Not only that He may see His people, but that He may save them, He besets them "behind and before." (*F. G. Marchant.*) **The people hasted.**—Probably the majority of the people were moved by fear, but some feelings may have led some of the host to hasten, and other considerations others. I. THE HASTE OF FEAR. This also leads to Canaan. II. THE HASTE OF DILIGENCE. With so much to be done, each had need to remember, "the night cometh." III. THE HASTE OF REVERENT OBEDIENCE. God does not work mightily and command urgently that men may move slothfully. IV. THE HASTE OF COMPASSION. While the people tarried, the priests must wait. No man ever idles without expense and inconvenience to some one else. V. THE HASTE OF UNCONSCIOUS INFLUENCE. The quick movement of a few would communicate itself to all. Our pace times that of our companion, and his that of others. (*Ibid.*) *Quick use of opportunity*:—They made the best use of the golden opportunity afforded them, and with the utmost alacrity and diligence hastened across the river while thus laid bare for them. The torrent was restrained by the mighty power of God to afford the people an opportunity to pass over dry-shod. But there was no time for presumptuous delays, as though they could count upon an indefinite prolongation of this favoured season, and might postpone crossing until it suited their pleasure, in the confidence that God's grace would wait upon their dilatory movements. There was no disposition on the part of any to remain as long as they could on the wilderness side, with any chance of getting into Canaan before the waters should rush back again into their accustomed channel. (*W. H. Green, D.D.*) *The people's haste*:—The priests and the ark stood still; but "the people hasted and

passed over." Many commentators assume that they hastened from fear. Such haste would have been both utterly unseemly, and an evil omen for the conquest. There were other reasons for making all possible haste. Were they not keeping the priests of God with their arms outstretched, to bear up their holy burden? And moreover, there, distinct before them, beautiful in the soft, rich light of the early morning, lay the homes, and vineyards, and fields, which they were to possess. A few steps, and their feet would be in Canaan; a few moments, and the weary waiting of years would end. As the tired labourer hastes at the first glimpse of his home, so must they have hastened. There may have been, also, some innocent rivalry to be among the first to touch the further shore. All these motives, indeed, might easily combine as they hastened and passed over. And shall not the thought that Jesus waits till all be gathered in—waits, without coming yet "in His power and great glory"—shall not this thought stir up His Church, not only to be looking for, but hastening His coming? The love of Christ constraining us, will urge us onward. And who that has had "the eyes of the understanding opened" to behold what are "the riches of glory" of this inheritance in Christ Jesus would not fain "to his speed add wings," that he might enter it and at once possess it? (*S. F. Smiley.*) **Come ye up out of Jordan.**—*Firm in duty:*—We can fancy how the people who had reached the western shore lined the bank, gazing on the group in the channel, who stood still waiting God's command to relieve them at their post. The word comes at last, and is immediately obeyed. May we not learn the lesson to stand fixed and patient wherever God sets us, as long as He does not call us thence? God's priests should be like the legionary on guard in Pompeii, who stuck to his post while the ashes were falling thick, and was smothered by them, rather than leave his charge without his commander's orders. One graphic word pictures the priests lifting, or, as it might be translated, "plucking," the soles of their feet from the slimy bottom into which they had settled down in their long standing still. They reach the bank, marching as steadily with their sacred burden as might be over so rough and slippery a road. The first to enter were the last to leave the river's bed. God's ark "goes before us," and "is our rearward." He besets us behind and before, and all dangerous service is safe if begun and ended in Him. The one point made prominent is the instantaneous rush back of the impatient torrent as soon as the curb was taken off. Like some horse rejoicing to be free, the tawny flood pours down, and soon everything looks "as aforetime," except for the new rock, piled by human hands, round which the waters chafed. The dullest would understand what had wrought the miracle when they saw the immediate consequence of the ark's leaving its place. Cause and effect seldom come thus close together in God's dealings; but sometimes He lets us see them as near each other as the lightning and the thunder, that we may learn to trace them in faith, when centuries part them. How the people would gaze as the hurrying stream covered up their path, and would look across to the further shore, almost doubting if they had really stood there that morning! They were indeed "Hebrews"—men from the other side—now, and would set themselves to the dangerous task before them with courage. Well begun is half done; and God would not divide the river for them to thrust them into a tiger's den, where they would be torn to pieces. Retreat was impossible now. A new page in their history was turned. The desert was as unreachable as Egypt. The passage of the Jordan rounded off the epoch which the passage of the Red Sea introduced, and began a new era. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Life a journey:*—I. THAT HUMAN LIFE IN THIS WORLD IS A JOURNEY. 1. Change of scenery. 2. Approach to an end. 3. Unsettledness of feeling. Life's journey is—(1) Unremitting; (2) irretraceable. II. THAT HUMAN LIFE IN THIS WORLD IS A JOURNEY WHICH WILL HAVE AN END. 1. Our end is certain. 2. It is solemn. III. HUMAN LIFE IN THIS WORLD WILL HAVE AN END WHICH MAY BE GLORIOUS. 1. It may be glorious in the courage of the traveller. 2. It may be glorious in the destination reached. (*Homilist.*) **Those twelve stones . . . did Joshua pitch in Gilgal.**—*The double monument of the passage of the Lord's host across the Jordan:*—Many fine allegories have been reared upon the foundation of the twenty-four stones that were placed, twelve in the river-bed, and twelve at the encampment in Gilgal. Some have spiritualised them as types of death and the resurrection; others have seen in them a representation of the prophets and apostles of the Old and New Testament dispensations. They mean that the passage of the Israelites over Jordan is—I. A REAL EVENT. The history that records it is not an oriental poem or a patriotic legend. It is not a fine conception

of an impassioned imagination. It is not an exaggeration. We have before us a plain matter of actual history. II. A SIGNIFICANT EVENT. 1. God was glorified. He was herein exhibited as "the living God" (chap. iii. 10), and "the Lord of all the earth" (chap. iii. 11). 2. Joshua, moreover, was magnified, and shown to be Moses' divinely-sanctioned successor (chap. iii. 7). 3. The Israelites, moreover, were assured. With the remembrance of the naked channel of Jordan, what cause of trepidation can remain? 4. By this miracle their enemies were appalled—namely, the inland Amorites, the immediate spectators; and the Canaanites, or coast tribes (Num. xiii. 30) in the distance, who heard the report (chap. v. 1). The passage took place "right against Jericho" (chap. iii. 16). Oh, portentous sight for the inhabitants of that fortress! III. A PATTERN EVENT. It was with apparent reference to this event that God promised His people by the mouth of the prophet Isaiah, "When thou passest through the waters," &c. Let us, then, claim the promise, and embrace the consolation that this history declares to us for ourselves. And what can we do in these "swellings of Jordan"? Here is an answer to our misgivings, "The Lord will do wonders among you!" IV. A SYMBOLICAL EVENT. 1. On the one hand, we may regard the passage of the Jordan as a glorious and "abundant entrance" into the promised inheritance. 2. On the other hand, we may regard it as illustrating, not only the triumphant close, but also the hopeful beginning of the believer's course, and conversion, not death, will be the aspect of Christian experience that we shall recognise. Application: 1. Are you yet in your sins? and do you long to experience the saving change of the new birth? But does a very torrent of difficulties seem to roll at their fullest height between you and the peace and pardon you long to enjoy? Go forward, and fear not. Jesus Himself calls you. He Himself accompanies you. Every hindrance will vanish if you obey His word. 2. Are you already amongst God's people? Have you anxieties, difficulties, obstructions, in your course of life? He who opened a highway through the Jordan is also your helper. 3. Is Jesus your hope, and do you nevertheless quail when you think of the hour of your departure hence, when you must leave all you love here below? (Isa. xliii. 1–8). (*G. W. Butler, M.A.*) *The stones of memorial*:—I. GREAT EVENTS DESERVE COMMEMORATION. In them God is the teacher. Men have always been ready to perpetuate the memory of their own great deeds. By memorial structures, memorial days, memorial observances, they have sought to keep alive the knowledge of their achievements and to foster a regard for the sentiments which lived in them. It has been common for all men in every age to act upon the principle which Daniel Webster stated when the corner-stone of the Bunker Hill Monument was laid: "Human beings are composed not of reason only, but of imagination also, and sentiment, and that is neither wasted nor misapplied which is appropriated to the purpose of giving right direction to sentiments, and opening proper springs of feeling in the heart." But no memorial structure elaborately reared to perpetuate right feeling and sentiment could subserve this end as fitly and fully as did the rude circle of stones set up at Gilgal. It nursed no pride of ancestry. It declared God's "mighty acts." Reminded by this rude memorial, one generation praised His works to another. They were led to speak of the glory of His kingdom, and to talk of His power. II. GOD EXPECTS THE CHILDREN TO BECOME INTERESTED IN GREAT EVENTS OF THE PAST. It was for the children's sake that the circle of stones was set up at Gilgal. It was to awaken their curiosity. God wishes the children to ask a great many questions. In this way He would have them learn what He has been doing for His people in past ages. III. GOD EXPECTS THE FATHERS TO BE READY TO ANSWER THE CHILDREN'S QUESTIONS. The stones of Gilgal could be of little use to those children whose parents did not keep freshly in mind the events commemorated. They would become a monument whose inscription had faded away. No doubt the word "fathers" means parents, but it is worthy of remark that it does not mean mothers only or especially. The father who gives over to the mother the religious training of the child fails in the special duty which fatherhood imposes. He shirks the greatest responsibility of life. The father who answers his child's questions by evasion acts unworthily. "My wife takes care of the religion of the family," a busy man said. But this is not God's plan. This father's life, in many respects admirable, failed miserably in a central, essential duty. For this failure no other well-doing could compensate. IV. THE STONES ERECTED AT GILGAL SUGGEST MORE LASTING MEMORIALS WHICH GOD HAS SET UP. 1. A memorial book. Concerning this book He would have the children question and the fathers give answer. How has this book been made, and by what providence

has it been preserved? 2. A Church with memorial rites. What do baptism and the Lord's Supper have to tell us about God's ways with men? 3. A memorial day. Sunday is God's commemoration day. It stands a lasting memorial of the greatest event in human history. (*W. G. Sperry.*) *The memorial stones:*—Gilgal, the first encampment, lay defenceless in the open plain, and the first thing to be done would be to throw up some earthwork round the camp. It seems to have been the resting-place of the ark, and probably of the non-combatants, during the conquest, and to have derived thence a sacredness which long clung to it, and finally led, singularly enough, to its becoming a centre of idolatrous worship. The rude circle of unhewn stones without inscription was, no doubt, exactly like the many prehistoric monuments found all over the world which forgotten races have raised to keep in everlasting remembrance forgotten fights and heroes. It was a comparatively small thing; for each stone was but a load for one man, and it would seem mean enough by the side of Stonehenge or Carnac, just as Israel's history is on a small scale as compared with the world-embracing empires of old. Size is not greatness; and Joshua's little circle told a more wonderful story than its taller kindred, or Egyptian obelisks or colossi. 1. These grey stones preached at once the duty of remembering and the danger of forgetting the past mercies of God. When they were reared they would seem needless; but the deepest impressions get filled up by degrees, as the river of time deposits its sands on them. We do not forget pain so quickly as joy, and most men have a longer and keener remembrance of their injurers than of their benefactors, human or Divine. The stones were set up because Israel remembered, but also lest Israel should forget. We often think of the Jews as monsters of ingratitude; but we should more truly learn the lesson of their history if we regarded them as fair, average men, and asked ourselves whether our recollection of God's goodness to us is much more vivid than theirs. Unless we make distinct and frequent efforts to recall, we shall certainly forget God's goodness. The cultivation of thankful remembrance is a very large part of practical religion; and it is not by accident that the psalmist puts it in the middle, between hope and obedience (Psa. lxxviii. 7). 2. The memorial stones further proclaimed the duty of parental instruction in God's mercies. They speak of a time when tradition was the vehicle of history; when books were rare, and monuments were relied upon to awaken curiosity which a father's words would satisfy. Notwithstanding all differences in means of obtaining knowledge, the old law remains in full force, that the parent is the natural and most powerful instructor in the ways of God. The decay of parental religious teaching is working enormous mischief in Christian households; and the happiest results would follow if Joshua's homely advice were attended to, "Ye shall let your children know." 3. The same principle which led to the erection of this simple monument reaches its highest and sacredest instance in the institution of the Lord's Supper, in which Jesus, with wonderful lowliness, condescends to avail Himself of material symbols in order to secure a firmer place in treacherous memories. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) **The Lord your God dried up the . . . Jordan.**—*Hindrances removed:*—That is true. We saw it. We were there. It is happening every day. Take out the mere detail and put in the great picture, and what is it? It is Divine interposition in the affairs of life. It is God taking away all hindrances to the progress which He Himself has purposed and defined; not the hindrances to your progress, but the hindrances to His own progress as shown through your life. He will not take any stones out of our way if they lie between us and ruin. He will rather embed those stones a little more firmly. God be praised for His hindrances! We wanted to make that contract, and could not. We had the pen in hand to sign it, but the ink would not flow, or the light suddenly gave out, and we dropped the pen. What did it? We see now we were going to sign away our birthright, our liberty, our honour, our conscience, and we were doing this more or less unconsciously, and God said "No." Blessed be God for His denials! Sometimes we are able to say, "Blessed be God for His bereavements!" Let God alone. Let us put our lives just into His hands and say, "Lord, they are Thy lives more than ours. Thou hast only lent them to us. We would not spoil one moment of these trembling frailties which we call our lives. Undertake everything for us and use us. We will run Thine errands, we will obey Thy will, we will do what Thou dost bid us do. Lord, undertake for us. Then if there is a river in the way Thou wilt dry it up, if there is a Red Sea in the way Thou wilt command it to stand back, and we shall walk through the beds of rivers as if they were beds of roses." You would be greatly comforted, as I have been in

a thousand instances, by reasoning from the river to the sea. This is the right method of inference, by induction and by deduction. What has God done for us in the past? Hear David. He said: "The God that delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from this uncircumcised Philistine. I will strike him in the name of the Eternal." Was it a rash act? It was reasoned piety. Why did the young man's blood boil for one moment and then subside? It was all the piety of the past gathered up into one supreme stroke. Sometimes one act of faith condenses a lifetime of study, experience, and prayer. Wondrously doth life bring its own power, and marvellously doth yesterday contribute its quota to the forces of to-day. When a great man advises you upon a certain course, he does not speak for the moment. For a quarter of a century and more he has been buried in the study of law, and when he gives you advice that could be written down in a line he puts a lifetime into that line. When the hoary physician touches your pulse half a century touches it. So we should thus see God moving, as in contemplation and in faith, from the Jordan to the Red Sea. He says to us, as we near the sea: "What about the Jordan? Was there one drop of water on the sole of your feet?" No, Lord, there was not. "Then," saith He in reply, "as with the Jordan, so with the Red Sea. It shall be dried up as if it had never been." When the disciples said, "How can we feed this multitude?" He said, "Did I not feed a multitude once. What lack was there then?" None. "Had the people barely enough to eat?" Nay. "How many baskets took you up?" Twelve. And He helped them to carry out that reasoning, that He who was able to do it once was able to do it twice; and if He could do it twice, He could do it for ever. Here is the historical lesson He teaches us, that what He did yesterday He is going to do to-morrow. If you have no faith in to-morrow, surely you have faith in your own recollection of yesterday. There are timid souls who never dare look at to-morrow. The Lord says to these, "Then think about yesterday; that is over. Now what was done to you yesterday? You thought your heart was going to burst. Did your heart break yesterday?" No. "You thought all things were against you yesternight. Did one star fall out of its place?" No, Lord, they are all there. "Then," saith God, "as yesterday, so to-morrow; as the Jordan, so the Red Sea." What is your experience? How have you been treated in straits and perplexities and difficulties? Who cooled your fever? Who brought light when all was darkness? Bacon saith, "A little learning inclineth to atheism"; but much learning, great wisdom, makes a man pray. Whenever you doubt God, think that you are but feebly or superficially instructed. When you can lean upon Him four-square, know that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. How true it is that all things in life are done by an unseen power in so far as they are either good or bad. The devil is as invisible as God. How wonderful a thing it is that life becomes shaped into palaces and temples without any handling of our own. The Jordan was dried up not with hands; the Red Sea was dried up—not with hands. Hands, poor hands, what can hands make? "The hand can make and break" is a little proverb, I would suggest. Whatever can be made by the hand can be unmade by the hand. God Himself takes all primary ministry unto His own power and employs us, even when we are going about our own errands, simply as His messengers. All life as it grows wisely and well turns and tends to service. Blessed be God, there is a bondage of love, there is a slavery of joy! Are you dreading the Jordan? He will dry it up for you if you put your trust in Him. Are you dreading the Red Sea? He will blow it away with the wind of His mouth. You may go within a step of it, nay, you nay touch it, but the moment the foot of faith touches that sea, the sea is gone. *(J. Parker, D.D.)*

CHAPTER V.

VER. 1. **Their heart melted . . . because of the children of Israel.**—*Divine control over all*:—Kings and princes, captains and nobles, are most perfectly under the control of God; not only their counsels and operations, but their very spirits are subject to the influence of His secret and all-pervading dominion; they are restrained by cowardice, or incited by courage; intimidated by fear, or emboldened

by valour, as best may promote the purposes of Providence and the interests of the Church. More has often been effected by this, wherein has appeared no human agency, than could have been by all the advantages of physical strength. It has been seen in the procedure of the Divine government, and opening of the secret counsels of heaven, that turns the most peculiar and results the most momentous have proceeded from this invisible working of God. But for this, the condition of Israel, as frequently appeared in review, would have inspired their adversaries, and, in the mere opposing of force to force, insured to them triumph. A spirit of blindness and infatuation has been permitted to seize the enemies of the Church, and to fall upon the powers of the world, or the Lord's people had again and again been swallowed up. The expedients of infinite wisdom, and resources of almighty power, never fail: they are innumerable, and always at command; not confined to the common laws of nature, but comprehend the secret dominion of spirits, and that unlimited range of omnipotence, by which, in special operations, all things are possible with God, and present to instant adoption, as the purposes of His love may require, or the counsel of His will determine. (*W. Seaton.*)

Vers. 2–9. **Make thee sharp knives and circumcise.**—*The circumcising at Gilgal*:—Even those comparatively unenlightened people must have realised that there was deep spiritual significance in the administration of that rite at that juncture. On more than one occasion they had heard Moses speak of circumcising the heart, and they must have felt that God meant to teach them the vanity of trusting to their numbers, or prowess, or martial array. Their strength was nothing to Him. The land was not to be won by their might, but to be taken from His hand as a gift. Self and the energy of the flesh must be set aside, that the glory of coming victory might be of God and not of man. We must be content to be reckoned among the things that are not, if we are to be used to bring to nought the things that are, "that no flesh should glory in His presence." We, too, must have our Gilgal. It is not enough to acknowledge as a general principle that we are dead and risen with Christ, we must apply it to our inner and outer life. We have no warrant to say that sin is dead, or that the principle of sin is eradicated, but that we are dead to it in our standing, and are dead to it also in the reckoning of faith. But for this we need the gift of the Blessed Spirit, in His Pentecostal fulness. It was by the Eternal Spirit that our Lord offered Himself in death upon the Cross, and it is by Him alone that we can mortify the deeds of the body. For, first, the spirit of self is so subtle. It is like a taint in the blood, which, stayed in one place, breaks out in another. Protean in its shapes and ubiquitous in its hiding-places, it requires omniscience to discover, and omnipresence to expel. And, secondly, only the Spirit of God has cords strong enough to bind us to the altar of death; to remind us in the hour of temptation; to enable us to look to Jesus for His grace; to inspire us with the passion of self-immolation; to keep us true and steady to the resolves of our holiest moments; to apply the withering fire of the Cross of Jesus to the growth of our self-conceit and self-energy—for all these the grace of the Spirit is indispensable. He is the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, therefore He must be the Spirit of death to all that pertains to the old Adam. There is a sense in which all believers have been circumcised in Christ; but there is another sense in which it is needful for them to pass one after another through the circumcision of Christ which is not made with hands, and which consists in the putting off of the body of the flesh. To that all who would lead a life of victory and inherit the land of promise must submit. The process may be sharp, for the knife does not spare pain. But it is in the hands of Jesus, the lover of souls. Oh, shrink not from it! (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Christian character*:—The more a man learns of God, the more he knows of grace. If we would apply to ourselves spiritually the lessons of the circumcision in the land, we must give the grace of God, which led to the circumcision, full place, and remember that God asks for the devotion of His people, because He has, in Christ, brought them into perfect favour. Was it by observing God's ordinances, or was it through God's almighty grace that Israel entered the land of promise? They entered it as a nation in uncircumcision, and therefore exclusively by God's sovereign grace. And why did God not seek for circumcision from the people of Israel, so long as they walk in the wilderness? The wilderness was the scene of their distrust of God. A distrusting spirit is ignorant of God's real character, and consequently is not morally fitted for separation to Himself; but God, having brought us by His grace to know ourselves to be in the heavenly places in Christ,

seeks separation to Himself, corresponding with the liberty into which He has brought us. Grace known and realised is the only true power for heart separation to God. Circumcision with Israel was merely a carnal ordinance, and, in common with all ordinances, gave neither power for communion with God, nor for conflict with His enemies. It was a sign that the children of Israel were God's earthly family, and a people separated from all the rest of mankind. The circumcision made without hands, with which the Christian is circumcised, in Christ, is a separation to God from the whole world. As the people of Israel, because brought through the Jordan, were enjoined by God to be circumcised, and their careless wilderness ways were allowed no longer, so the Christian, because he has died with Christ to the world, and to his old self, is exhorted to mortify his members, and his worldly ways are no longer permitted. This mortification is simply self-denial, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Man naturally loves sin; he loves his own way which is the essence of sin; but he who lives in Christ is called to die to himself in daily walk and conduct. There is no way of living to Christ but by dying to self. It was by no means sufficient to Israel to know that they went across the Jordan, in order to enjoy the riches of the inheritance; for until circumcision was effected none of Canaan's food was spread before them, nor were they called to conflict. And we may be sure that so long as we walk in the flesh and please ourselves, there can be no communion—no feeding upon Christ. Neither can there be any victories for the Lord, unless self is subdued. Satan would beguile the youthful believer into the misty atmosphere of a Canaan of the imagination, where the flesh is allowed to work. In this aerial Christianity, circumcision—self-mortification—is not permitted; the practical result of being dead with Christ is not allowed to wound the will. But there is no stability of soul, no solid devotedness. Such a believer is like the insect, which, well-nigh composed of wings, and possessing scarcely any weight, is driven from the flower garden by the first storm. Sorrowful as is the result of letting the imagination carry away the soul, perhaps the effect of accepting Divine truth in intellectualism is more so. A Christian holding the doctrine of death with Christ, and resurrection with Christ, in the understanding only, goes out from the sunlight of God's presence into a land of deathlike coldness. If circumcision in its spiritual signification were rightly valued, such abuses of the truth of God would certainly find no place in the believer's heart. To mortify our members is not a painless exercise. Saying, "We are dead," is not mortifying; but it is to deny the wishes of our old nature because "we are dead" (Rom. viii. 13). The mere fact of the people of Israel's entrance into Canaan did not constitute them at liberty before God. They were brought into the land of promise by the passage of the Jordan, but were not pronounced free by Jehovah until circumcised. God's liberty for His people is that of His own making, and therefore perfect. It is what He thoroughly approves and delights in. And the means by which, step by step, He brings His people into the enjoyment of this liberty, is grace. If we are God's free men, it is evidently in the land of promise that we have liberty, for only in the fulness of God's favour can we experience His rolling away the reproach of our bondage. (*The Gospel in the Book of Joshua.*) *Why was circumcision suspended in the wilderness?*—Some have said that, owing to the circumstances in which the people were, it would not have been convenient, perhaps hardly possible, to administer the rite on the eighth day. Moving as they were from place to place, the administration of circumcision would often have caused so much pain and peril to the child, that it is no wonder it was delayed. And once delayed, it was delayed indefinitely. But this explanation is not sufficient. There were long, very long periods of rest, during which there could have been no difficulty. A better explanation, brought forward by Calvin, leads us to connect the suspension of circumcision with the punishment of the Israelites, and with the sentence that doomed them to wander forty years in the wilderness. When the worship of the golden calf took place, the nation was rejected, and the breaking by Moses of the two tables of stone seemed an appropriate sequel to the rupture of the covenant which their idolatry had caused. And though they were soon restored, they were not restored without certain drawbacks—tokens of the Divine displeasure. Probably the suspension of circumcision was included in the punishment of their sins. They were not to be allowed to place on their children the sign and seal of a covenant which in spirit and in reality they had broken. But it was not an abolition, only a suspension. The time might come when it would be restored. The natural time for this would be the end of the forty years of chastisement. These forty years have now come to an end. Doubtless it would have been a great

joy to Moses if it had been given him to see the restoration of circumcision, but that was not to take place until the people had set foot on Abraham's land. We may well think of it as an occasion of great rejoicing. The visible token of his being one of God's children was now borne by every man and boy in the camp. In a sense they now proved themselves heirs to the covenant made with their fathers, and might thus rest with firmer trust on the promise—"I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee." Two other points demand a word of explanation. The first is the statement that "all the people that were born in the wilderness . . . they had not circumcised" (ver. 5). If the view be correct that the suspension of circumcision was part of the punishment for their sins, the prohibition would not come into operation for some months, at all events, after the exodus from Egypt. We think, with Calvin, that for the sake of brevity the sacred historian makes a general statement without waiting to explain the exceptions to which it was subject. The other point needing explanation is the Lord's statement after the circumcision (ver. 9). The words imply that, owing to the want of this sacrament, they had lain exposed to a reproach from the Egyptians, which was now rolled away. What seems the most likely explanation is, that when the Egyptians heard how God had all but repudiated them in the wilderness, and had withdrawn from them the sign of His covenant, they malignantly crowed over them, and denounced them as a worthless race, who had first rejected their lawful rulers in Egypt under pretext of religion, and, having shown their hypocrisy, were now scorned and cast off by the very God whom they had professed themselves so eager to serve. But now the tables are turned on the Egyptians. The restoration of circumcision stamps this people once more as the people of God. (*G. W. Blaikie, D.D.*) *The reproach of Egypt*:—By this reproach we are to understand all that stigma which clung to Israel through its relation to Egypt. This stigma had two aspects, an inner and an outer; an active and a passive. It consisted in that feeling of humiliation and self-reproach, which must have rested on the heart of every intelligent and pious Israelite during the wilderness wanderings. And it also consisted in the feeling of scorn and contempt with which their great oppressors the Egyptians must have looked upon them during all that period. In its inward aspect, the reproach of Egypt was caused by spiritual assimilation to Egypt. Moses had said, "The Lord will put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel." This difference was manifested in many striking ways, during the progress of Israel's gradual emancipation. But when this rite was in abeyance, this difference was lost in a measure. Physically, there was no difference between the children born in Egypt after the Exodus and those born in the wilderness. Circumcision was, as it were, God's brand on His people marking them for His own. Its lack proclaimed that they were "Lo Ammi," not God's people. But there could be no greater outward stigma than this. It was Israel's glory to be Jehovah's peculiar people and to bear in their bodies the seal of His covenant. From this height of privilege they looked down on all men. For an Israelite, therefore, to consider his position during the forty years, would be to acknowledge that there was no difference, so far, between him and an Egyptian. Jehovah was no longer, in this mode of outward recognition, his God. But there was a deeper and more potent assimilation, of which the outward and physical was only the sign. There was on the part of Israel assimilation to Egypt in spirit. They reproached God for their redemption, saying that He had brought them from Egypt to destroy them; they actually went the length of appointing a leader to guide them back to the house of bondage. What could be more grievous than such sin? what could more plainly show their assimilation in heart to Egypt? Therefore to a pious and penitent Israelite there was here cause for the deepest abasement. His cry in self-reproach would be, "My sin is ever before me." This also would be implied in the inner aspect of the reproach of Egypt. But in addition to this inner aspect of the reproach, there is also the outer to be considered. The reproach of Egypt not only consisted in those feelings which must have taken possession of a pious Israelite, but also in those taunts which must have been hurled at them by Egypt. Their haughty taskmasters would no doubt make their former bondmen a subject of reproach and mocking scorn. They would look down upon them, and speak of them with unutterable contempt. They would describe them as a despicable race of worthless runaways. And they would also find good cause for merriment in the prolonged wanderings in the wilderness. "Where are all their high hopes?" they might have said. "They have ended in smoke. A great deal better off they are now than they were with us, hungering and thirsting in that desert, instead of living on the fat of the land! A

nice wild-goose chase that famous Moses has led them." Such was the reproach of Egypt; but here and now it is rolled away. By this act at Gilgal Israel is no longer assimilated to Egypt in body. The knives of flint have again put a difference between Israel and Egypt. Each man bears in his body the mark of Jehovah's covenant. And seeing the land of Canaan was God's gift to them as Abraham's seed, and to Abraham's seed as faithful to Jehovah, *i.e.*, as circumcised, this act was a Divine and formal conveyance of the land to these men of Israel. Thus at Gilgal the title-deeds of Canaan were signed, sealed, and delivered; and thus again, the reproach of Egypt was rolled away. Israel is no longer a homeless wanderer but an heir of God. Also the assimilation to Egypt in spirit has come to an end. No longer are they uncircumcised in heart. Never again do they cast a longing, lingering look behind. Surely this transaction is also recorded for our instruction and reproof. Gilgal says, "Put off the old man with his affections and lusts; put off all moral and spiritual assimilation to the world. Crucify the flesh and its deceitful lusts. Mortify the deeds of the body." The great need of the present age is to be brought in spirit to Gilgal, *i.e.*, to learn to the very centre of our souls the spirit of self-sacrifice. The process may be painful, like cutting off a right arm or plucking out a right eye; yet it is the necessary sequel of entrance into God's inheritance. And as it is the necessary sequel of entrance, so is it the necessary prelude to worship and to victory. There can be no true worship of God except our hearts are cleansed from the filthiness of the flesh. There can be no true victory for God, either within or without, except our souls are purged from the power of sin. (*A. B. Mackay.*)

The consecration of the Lord's host at Gilgal; or, a revival:—The need, the tokens, and the blessedness of this revival are set before us. (1) Its need appears in the reproach of Egypt. (2) Its tokens are the restoration of ordinances. (3) Its blessedness consists in the return of favour. I. Let us first dwell upon the need of Israel's revival, as seen in THE REPROACH OF EGYPT. There are many among us who have indeed left Egypt. To the questions, "Is the Lord among us, or not?—Are we His people?" they can humbly answer "Yes"; for He has given them sure pledges of their interest in the everlasting covenant. And yet, if asked to give a reason of the hope that is in them, they would not be ready. The answer of faith can scarce find utterance amid the sins and shortcomings that compass them round, and testify against them. Their words, their tempers, their works, their experiences, all seem to give the lie to their Christian profession and to their hope. The world of unbelievers, too, joins issue against them, and, discerning their failures and inconsistencies, derides their religion, calls them hypocrites, and prophesies their doom. This "reproach of Egypt," lies heavy upon God's saints who thus walk in darkness. II. The narrative goes on to tell of the tokens of Israel's revival, as seen in THE RESTORATION OF ORDINANCES. As the sacrament of baptism perpetuates and expands the teaching of the rite of circumcision, so that of the Lord's Supper repeats the lessons of the Passover. The Christian ordinance looks back, as the Jewish sacrifice looked forward, to the death of Jesus as our substitute. Since the fall of Adam, there has been but this one way of salvation. May we, amid our fuller privileges, and clearer light, approach the same God whom Israel worshipped, confiding in the same atonement, and renew our covenant with Him in the breaking of bread, and the drinking of the cup of blessing. Our feast similarly commemorates the past, the present, and the future: for we herein shew forth an accomplished redemption, our own reconciliation thereby, and our participation in our Saviour's love at the marriage feast above. III. It remains for us now to speak of the blessedness of Israel's revival, as seen in THE RETURN OF FAVOUR. 1. First, the Lord expressly declares to Joshua, as the head and representative of the nation, "This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you." Blessed assurance! 2. Beside the answer of God to Joshua, a second gracious token was granted. The enemy was still as a stone. With blanched cheeks and palpitating hearts, the Canaanites looked on and saw the people all encamped at Gilgal. Now, shall not Israel, with soldierly decision, seize on the opportunity, and ere they have recovered from their panic, strike a decisive blow, and so possess the land? Such is not the Lord's order: but until the fourteenth day of the month the men of war are shut up in their tents; and then, as though in a land of peace, during a full week the Passover is kept throughout their families. 3. Was it not providentially ordered by a loving Father that Israel should be brought into the land at the time of harvest? Thus temporal supplies shall not fail those whom God accepts and approves: thus, also, spiritual provision shall

never fail God's people. 4. The close of the chapter presents us with a fourth token of the return of favour to Israel, in the manifestation to Joshua of the great Angel of the Covenant, with His drawn sword lifted, not in vengeance against Israel, but against their foes. This was the promised angel who should go before them, and lead them to victory. (*G. W. Butler, M.A.*) *Gilgal:*—I. ATTENTION TO THE SPECIAL SERVICES WHICH WE OWE TO GOD OUGHT TO STAND BEFORE ALL OTHER CONSIDERATIONS. What is religion? The question seems a simple one; but, indeed, it is one the true answer to which involves a great deal. The term is a most comprehensive one, including all that men should believe and all that men should do. A religious person is one whose heart has been imbued with Christian truth, and whose affection has laid hold on God as revealed in the Scriptures with a firm grasp; a person whose life, regulated increasingly by such principles, manifests more and more of the beauty of holiness. In religion, then, we come to deal with the doctrine and the practice of the Bible. It tells of what may alarm, and what may soothe. It shows a reality of wretchedness, want, guilt and death in which men are by nature; and a reality of joy, perfection, righteousness and life in which they may be by grace. It appeals to men as immortal beings, urges on them the consideration of their immortal interests, and in the words of Him, around whom all true religion circles and to whom it is intended to lead, charges all thus: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." I would ask you, seriously, should not this matter have our first and most solemn consideration? Is there any matter which ought to engage us before this? II. WE MAY REPOSE IMPLICIT CONFIDENCE IN GOD WHILE WALKING IN HIS WAYS AND AIMING AT HIS GLORY. Men are never losers by religion. The man who can style himself servant of Christ has a Master whose service is the guarantee for every possible good. Affairs and matters come to be so differently weighed and estimated, when heavenly wisdom is granted for the test, that it is no wonder to find men reckoning gains and losses, probabilities and duties, by a standard the reverse of that which they formerly used. What if we had accosted the leader of the hosts of Israel when he promulgated the order for observing circumcision and the Passover at Gilgal? Suppose that we had said, Strike your decisive blow; push on at once; select your picked men, and leave the rest to fortify your position, and to take care of the women and children; go straight up to Jericho. Your rite of circumcision will render you defenceless, your paschal feast is hardly fitted to such a critical position and such unusual circumstances as yours. Suppose that we had argued with Joshua thus. Would not his reply have been, "We can trust God: we know Him. He has said, 'I will not fail you, nor forsake you'"? (*C. D. Marston, M.A.*) *Time taken for religious duties is not lost:*—Dr. James Hamilton once related an anecdote which illustrates a vital question in the Christian life. A writer recounts it as follows: "A gallant officer was pursued by an overwhelming force, and his followers were urging him to greater speed, when he discovered that his saddle-girth was becoming loose. He coolly dismounted, repaired the girth by tightening the buckle, and then dashed away. The broken buckle would have left him on the field a prisoner; the wise delay to repair damages sent him on in safety amid the huzzas of his comrades." The Christian who is in such haste to get about his business in the morning that he neglects his Bible and his season of prayer rides all day with a broken buckle.

Vers. 10–12. **Encamped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover.**—*Three successive days:*—In one of his sonnets, Matthew Arnold tells of an interview he had on a day of fierce August sunshine, in Bethnal Green, with a preacher whom he knew, and who looked ill and overworked. In answer to the inquiry as to how he fared, "Bravely!" said he; "for I of late have been much cheered with thoughts of Christ, the Living Bread." There is a great difference between the strength which may be supplied from without, and that which is assimilated within. To illustrate the first. We tread the cathedral close and examine the mighty buttresses that steady the ancient walls. What though the "high embowed roof" presses on them with all its weight to make them bulge, they may not stir an inch from the perpendicular so long as those masses of stone, built up without, forbid. To illustrate the second. We must visit the forest glade, where giant oaks withstand the blasts of centuries, because they have incorporated into their hearts the properties of earth and air, becoming robust, and sturdy, and storm-defying. There are many ways in which the holy soul derives strength from without. It is buttressed by remonstrances and appeals, by providences and promises, by the fear of causing grief, and by the incitement of passionate devotion. But if these were all they would be in-

sufficient. We need to be strengthened from within, to have within ourselves the strong Son of God; to know that the Mightiest is within us, and working through us, so that we, even as He, can do all things. In this old record we may discover without effort the Living Bread under three aspects—the Passover; the corn of the land; the manna. Each of these consumed one of three successive days. I. THE PASSOVER. How little we understand the way by which each part of our body takes the particular nourishment it requires from the food we eat. But we know that such is the case, and that bones, muscles, and tissues appropriate their sustenance from the common store. So though we may not be able to explain the philosophy of the process, we believe and are sure, that as we hold fellowship with Jesus in quiet hallowed moments, our weakness absorbs His strength, our impatience His long-suffering, our restlessness His calm, our ignorance His wisdom. "He is made to us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." His flesh is "true meat" because it makes us strong to endure and do. His blood is "true drink," because it satisfies our thirst, and makes glad our heart. But let it ever be borne in mind that as no uncircumcised person was permitted to partake of the Passover, so none who are living in wilful sin can feed on the flesh and blood which were given for the life of the world. There must be a Gilgal before there can be a Passover in the deepest and fullest sense. This is why you have no zest in prayer, no appetite for your Bible, no enjoyment in the ordinances of the House of God. You have not yet put away all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, you have not yet submitted yourself to the sharp two-edged sword, you have not yet been delivered from the reproach of Egypt, you have not yet purged out the leaven of insincerity and falsehood. II. THE CORN OF THE LAND. The Paschal Lamb is good, but the corn of the land includes the fruits, and honey, and bread-stuffs that grow on the soil of the Resurrection-life. The ascension of Christ may be considered in many aspects, but in each we seem to stand beneath His outstretched hands of benediction, as they did who saw Him parted from them, and taken up before their adoring gaze. Happy indeed are they who also in heart and mind thither ascend, and with Him continually dwell. To do this is to eat of the corn and fruit of the land. III. THE MANNA. The corn began before the manna ceased. The one overlapped the other as the thatch of a hay-rick or the feathers of a bird. God does not wish that there should be those intervals of apparent desertion, and the failure of supplies of which so many complain. It is quite likely that He may have to withdraw the extraordinary and exceptional, as represented by the manna; but He will wait until we have become accustomed to the ordinary and regular supplies of His grace, as represented by the corn. In the blessings of our outward life, He does sometimes humble us, and suffer us to hunger. The brook Cherith dries before He sends us to Zarephath. But as to the inward life, He gives without stint. The table is always prepared before us in the presence of our enemies—one form of soul-sustenance is within reach before another form fails; we must have learned to feed ourselves with strong meat before He drops the spoon with which He had been wont to nourish us with milk. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) **The manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land.**—*Manna and corn:*—Various conjectures have been formed regarding the nature of the manna, which every morning whitened like hoar-frost the ground around the encampment of the Israelites in the wilderness. It was indeed a miraculous substance in the sense of its having been provided at the very time when, and in the very circumstances where, it was required. But we have no reason to believe that it was in itself a miraculous substance, a material previously unknown, created specially for the purpose and coming down straight from heaven. God economises the supernatural element in His working, and makes use of ordinary means as far as they will go. He who used the ordinary thorny growth of the desert as the medium of His transcendent revelation when He appeared in the burning bush, and converted the simple shepherd's rod in the hand of Moses into a serpent, and made it the instrument of compassing the deliverance of Israel by signs and wonders, would in all likelihood employ on this occasion a substance indigenous to the desert, as the basis of the great miracle which He wrought for the supply of the daily bread of His people. Such a substance might well have been the white hard exudation that drops from the thorns of the tamarisk shrub, and frequently covers the ground to a considerable extent, which is used for food at the present day by the Arabs, and to which they give the name of manna. We cannot expect to trace an exact correspondence, for some of the qualities and conditions of the manna of Scripture were unmistakably supernatural. It is sufficient if the natural object could serve as a mere fulcrum for the miracle.

But whatever might have been the nature and origin of the mysterious substance which God made use of, it is evident that the manna was intended to serve a wise and gracious purpose in the religious economy of the Israelites. He who said that if we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness all other things that we truly need will be given to us, furnished a remarkable illustration of the truth of the promise in the experience of the Israelites. There was no want to those who feared God and did His will; bread was given to them and their water was sure, even if the bread had to come down from heaven and the water had to be produced from the flinty rock by the smiting of the miraculous rod. But this supernatural life was not to last for ever. It was appropriate to the wilderness, God's special dwelling-place, as it were, where there was nothing but God and nature; but it was not suitable to the promised land, where all the conditions of a natural human life existed, and which was the haunt of man as well as the scene of nature's most beneficent operations. Accordingly we read that when the Israelites first tasted of the corn of Canaan at Gilgal, the manna which had been their food for so many years previously ceased at once. The natural, which is always, superseded the supernatural, which is only occasional. The miracle must give place to the common processes of life. The manna ceasing when the Israelites ate of the corn of Canaan teaches us the lesson that God's help is given, not to supersede our self-help, but to enable us to help ourselves. No one can truly know what it is to find his sufficiency in God but he who puts forth all the strength which he himself possesses. It is exactly in proportion as we strive to do all, and strive in vain, that we can have an experimental consciousness of God's help is given, not to supersede our self-help, but to enable us to help ourselves. No one can truly know what it is to find his sufficiency in God but he who puts forth all the strength which he himself possesses. It is exactly in proportion as we strive to do all, and strive in vain, that we can have an experimental consciousness of God's almighty aid. And thus the believer feels that God's strength is made perfect in his own weakness. The difference between manna and corn is most suggestive. Manna was a supernatural product provided directly by Divine power. It came to the Israelites in the wilderness without any toil or trouble of their own. No tiller of the ground had wrought for it in the sweat of his face, and therefore it was but little esteemed by the Israelites. They soon lost their relish for it; it became tasteless and insipid, and their souls loathed it in the end. But corn, on the other hand, implies and involves great and continuous labour. A sacrifice is made, a loss sustained in parting with the seed-corn. There is much sweat of the face in preparing the ground for its reception; faith is exercised in entrusting it to the earth; patience and hope in watching its growth and waiting for its ripening; and toil again is required in reaping, storing, and preparing the harvest for bread. And is there not the same wide difference in spiritual things between manna and corn—between what is given to us without any toil or trouble of our own, and what is wrought out for us and in us, as the result of our own toil and, it may be, our own sad experience? No doubt we should prefer manna to corn; we should like to get heavenly blessings straight out of God's hands. But the rule of the Divine kingdom is "no cross, no crown." In no other way would God's spiritual or natural blessings do us good. Only in this Divine way does the procuring of them act as a heavenly discipline, counteracting the evil tendencies of our nature, enabling us to sympathise with the plans and hopes of God, and fitting us for the enjoyment of His everlasting rest. When the Israelites entered the Holy Land, God gave them at first the corn of their enemies, as He had given them the manna of the wilderness. That was necessary—just as it is necessary for the child to be supported at first by its mother's nourishment, and the young plant by the provision stored up in the seed. But this old corn would last only a little while; it would cease as the manna had ceased. When it was done the Israelites would have to sow and reap their fields in order to get a new supply; they would have to provide for themselves by the toil of their hands. And how significant of the new life which it nourished was the new corn in these circumstances! The Israelites looked forward from the wilderness to the promised land as the place of consummation and rest. But they found that their former discipline in the new circumstances was not ended, but only changed in its character; that amid golden cornfields and rich pastures and luxuriant vineyards they would have to practise in even higher degree the virtues which the wilderness-life called forth. And how symbolical was the new corn of the land—the bread for which they toiled in the sweat of their face—of this life of self-conquest and devotion which it sustained! It might seem that their life in the wilderness, directly supported by God and under His immediate care, was higher and more heavenly than their life in Canaan, sowing and reaping their fields, and providing for their wants by their own labour. But it was not so; for the wilderness-life fed by the manna of heaven was only an introduction to, and a preparation for, the higher life of Canaan fed by the corn of earth. And let us

remember this solemn fact when we are tempted to think that life spent in directly religious acts in the sanctuary, at the communion-table, in the closet, a holier and more acceptable life to God than the life spent in the place of business and in our homes, in everyday duties and labours. The incident of the manna of the wilderness giving place to the corn of Canaan is in entire harmony with all God's dealings with man. The dispensation that was inaugurated by supernatural manifestations is carried on by common helps, and through the homely experiences of human life. The supernatural life in the visible presence of Jesus must merge into the natural life of faith and hope amid ordinary circumstances. God gives at appropriate times meat to eat which the world knoweth not of—hidden manna, living bread direct from heaven. And when the manna is withdrawn and we are supplied with corn—with "human nature's daily food"—let us seek to profit by what the manna has done for us and taught us. We have received spiritual food that we may have grace and strength to carry on the common duties of life. We have tasted that the Lord is gracious on the Holy Mount that we may follow hard after Him along the beaten paths of life. (*H. Macmillan, D.D.*) *Not manna, but old corn:*—The manna ceased when the people had the old corn of the land. Now the question is—I. WAS THE OLD CORN OF THE LAND ANY LESS WONDERFUL THAN THE BREAD OF THE WILDERNESS? If we think of the reproductive energy of nature we are amazed. There are always apples, pears, grapes, melons, cherries, gooseberries, currants; there is always wheat for man, and corn for animals. The year comes, and these things come. But more than recurrence, there is multiplication. One grain of wheat will produce from 20 to 100. This is as inexplicable a wonder as was the manna, and cannot be explained without the recognition of two facts—the Divine power, and the Divine wisdom. Life and growth are in the hands of the Lord. The common mercies of life are direct Divine gifts. But look at another fact—the whole material life of the nation, and of the world, depends upon the harvest. If bread be dear there is less to spend upon other things. The price paid for bread depends upon the abundance or deficiency of the harvest; and that fixes the amount of production which can safely be ventured upon; and that again, the wages that can be paid; and that again, the condition of every poor man's cottage, and of every rich man's mansion throughout the land, and throughout the world. Manna! An international aspect of the question is thus unfolded. The necessities of peoples, and the abrogation of distance, and their separations by steam, have led to a freer exchange of commodities. We have had three or four poor harvests, but bread has not risen as it must otherwise have done! Why? Distant supplies have been available: we are not now dependent only on our own harvest. II. CONSIDER THE CEASING OF THE MANNA IN CONNECTION WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S LIFE. The gathering of manna from the ground was a short and simple affair, requiring neither much skill nor wit. In the land miracles ceased, and means had to be employed. Gifts are not so helpful as labour. To earn a fortune is better than to inherit one. III. THE CEASING OF THE MANNA SUGGESTS THE REMOVAL OF THINGS ON WHICH HUMAN HAPPINESS SEEMS HERE WHOLLY TO DEPEND. IV. CANAAN WAS A TYPE OF HEAVEN, AND THE CEASING OF THE BREAD OF THE WILDERNESS SUGGESTS THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE CONDITION OF LIFE HERE AND THERE. We shall lose much we here deem essential, but it is far better. What will it be to be there? It is the harvest-life of earth and time and the redeemed Church. (*W. H. Davison.*) *Corn for manna:*—After receiving the title-deeds of an estate, the next step is to enter into possession. And one of the best evidences that this has been done, is to take the use of all that the inheritance contains. Thus the Israel of God acted. First they celebrate the solemn feast of the Passover, and then partake of the fruits of the land. In this connection two things are coupled together, the eating of the corn and the cessation of the manna. I. THIS SUDDEN CHANGE WOULD BRING TO MIND GOD'S POWER. It is a well-known fact that our ears may get so accustomed to a sound as to be unconscious of it. In like manner men may get so accustomed to the wonders of God's might as to be unmoved by them. But this sudden stoppage of the manna must have arrested them all. It would be as if the sun had risen in the west. How strikingly would it teach them that this was a gift of Almighty power! The manna came not a day sooner than it was needed, and it did not stay a day later. They beheld the manna no more: but they saw instead fields white unto the harvest, and the power of Jehovah matured the one as truly as it sent the other. God has been supplying our wants of mind, body, and estate during all the past years of our life; and it may be we have been forgetting that we owe all to His power; therefore, to rouse us to this consciousness, He cuts off

these supplies. The shock is great. Astonishment fills our hearts. Sorrow lays hold on us; indeed, we may be tempted to despair. Is this seemly? Nay. If we are His there is never room for despair. We can never drift beyond His love and care. He who has provided for the past will provide for the future. II. The cessation of the manna would also MAGNIFY HIS GRACE. Whatever their feelings and thoughts and deeds, whatever their spiritual state during these years, His supply never varied, was never suspended for a single day. And surely in our earthly course we too have had experience of this goodness of God. Notwithstanding our forgetfulness, thanklessness, rebellion, He has never cast us off, He has never left us to ourselves. He who has thus dealt with us in the past, will continue to do so to the end. III. This event would also EXALT HIS LIBERALITY. There is a great change in the material supplied to Israel for its physical wants. But it is a change, not from better to worse, rather from good to better. For forty years they had been accustomed to food of the same flavour; now there is great diversity, a supply to suit every taste. During these past years the supply was measured, there was a fixed quantity for each; now the store is unlimited. As it was with Israel in regard to this bodily provision, so it is with the children of God in regard to that which is spiritual. They receive grace and more grace. They go from strength to strength. With ever-increasing capacity comes more and more abundant supply. And this law not only regulates the Christian experience on earth and in time, it will also hold in heaven and in eternity. Faith, hope, and love are graces that abide for ever. IV. This cessation of the manna would also serve to DISPLAY GOD'S CAREFULNESS. God is very liberal, but with all His liberality there is no wastefulness. God always appraises His gifts at their true value, and would have us do the same. God will never be so lavish of His gifts as to allow them to be scorned as superfluous. When He gives them the abundance of Canaan He takes away the manna. When men become careless or indifferent concerning His heavenly gifts, we need never be surprised if He takes them away. V. This cessation of the manna also EXHIBITED GOD'S WISDOM. The manna was suited to the state of the people in the wilderness, it was not so convenient an article of food in Canaan. Whether or not it was more nourishing, it did not demand the same punctuality and regularity in gathering, and therefore was more suitable as the supply of soldiers. Corn would keep for an indefinite time, manna would not; therefore for those whose time would be so fully occupied, and yet whose hours of rest and work would be so uncertain, the corn was better. Also to have continued the supply regularly or intermittently, even for those who were not fighting, would have bred indolent and luxurious habits. It is good for man to be busy. As it is with material things so it is with spiritual. As the manna was taken away, so often spiritual experiences vanish to make room for others. Anything which does not serve the purpose for which it was first given may well be taken away. Thus we find as we pass through time that though many gifts, good, seasonable, necessary, are taken away, there are always compensations which leave us no losers. (*A. B. Mackay.*) *Corn in place of manna*:—This subject leads me, first, to speak of special relief for special emergency; and, secondly, of the old corn of the Gospel for ordinary circumstances. If these Israelites crossing the wilderness had not received bread from the heavenly bakeries, there would, first, have been a long line of dead children half buried in the sand; then, there would have been a long line of dead women waiting for the jackals; then, there would have been a long line of dead men unburied, because there would have been no one to bury them. It would have been told in the history of the world that a great company of good people started out from Egypt for Canaan, and were never heard of, as thoroughly lost in the wilderness of sand as the *City of Boston* and the *President* were lost in the wilderness of waters. What use was it to them that there was plenty of corn in Canaan, or plenty of corn in Egypt? What they wanted was something to eat right there, when there was not so much as a grass-blade. In other words, an especial supply for an especial emergency. That is what some of you want. The ordinary comfort, the ordinary direction, the ordinary counsel, do not seem to meet your case. There are those who feel that they must have an omnipotent and immediate supply, and you shall have it. Is it pain and physical distress through which you must go? Does not Jesus know all about pain? He has a mixture of comfort, one drop of which shall cure the worst paroxysm. Is it approaching sorrow? Have you been calculating your capacity or incapacity to endure widowhood or childlessness or disbanded home, and cried, "I cannot endure it"? Oh, worried soul, you will wake up amidst all your troubles, and find round about

you the sweet consolation of the Gospel as thickly strewed as was the manna round about the Israelitish encampment! Especial solace for especial distress. Or is it a trouble past, yet present? A silent nursery? A vacant chair opposite you at the table? Oh, try a little of this wilderness manna: "I will never leave thee, I will never forsake thee." "Like as a father pitieth his children," &c. But after fourteen thousand six hundred consecutive days of falling manna—Sundays excepted—the manna ceased. Some of them were glad of it. You know they had complained to their leader, and wondered that they had to eat manna instead of onions. Now the fare is changed. Those people in that wandering army under forty years of age had never seen a cornfield, and now, when they hear the leaves rustling and see the tassels waving, and the billows of green flowing over the plain as the wind touched them, it must have been a new and lively sensation. "Corn!" cried the old man, as he opened an ear. "Corn!" cried the children, as they counted the shining grains. "Corn!" shouted the vanguard of the host, as they burst open the granaries of the affrighted population, the granaries that had been left in the possession of the victorious Israelites. Then the fire was kindled, and the ears of corn were thrust into it, and, fresh and crisp and tender, were devoured of the hungry victors; and bread was prepared, and many things that can be made out of flour regaled appetites sharpened by the long march. "And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land." Blessed be God, we stand in just such a field to-day, the luxuriant grain coming above the girdle, the air full of the odours of the ripe old corn of the Gospel Canaan. "Oh!" you say, "the fare is too plain." Then I remember you will soon get tired of a fanciful diet. We soon weary of the syrups and the custards and the whipped foam of fanciful religionists, and we cry, "Give us plain bread made out of the old corn of the Gospel Canaan." This is the only food that can quell the soul's hunger. Christ is the Bread of Life, and taking Him, you live and live for ever. But, you say, corn is of but little practical use unless it is threshed and ground and baked. I answer, this Gospel corn has gone through that process. When on Calvary all the hoofs of human scorn came down on the heart of Christ, and all the flails of Satanic fury beat Him long and fast, was not the corn threshed? When the mills of God's indignation against sin caught Christ between the upper and nether rollers, was not the corn ground? Oh, yes! Christ is ready. His pardon all ready; His peace all ready; everything ready in Christ. Are you ready for Him? There is another characteristic about bread, and that is, you never get tired of it. There are people here seventy years of age who find it just as appropriate for their appetite as they did when, in boyhood, their mother cut a slice of it clear around the loaf. You have not got tired of bread, and that is a characteristic of the gospel. I notice, in regard to this article of food, you take it three times a day. It is on your table morning, noon, and night; and if it is forgotten, you say, "Where is the bread?" Just so certainly you need Jesus three times a day. Oh, do not start out without Him; do not dare to go out of the front door, without having first communed with Him! Before noon there may be perils that will destroy body, mind, and soul for ever. You cannot afford to do without Him. You will, during the day, be amidst sharp hoofs and swift wheels and dangerous scaffoldings threatening the body, and traps for the soul that have taken some who are more wily than you. When they launch a ship they break against the side of it a bottle of wine. That is a sort of superstition among sailors. But oh, on the launching of every day, that we might strike against it at least one earnest prayer for Divine protection! Then at the apex of the day, at the tiptop of the hours, equidistant from morning and night, look three ways. Look backward to the forenoon; look ahead to the afternoon; look up to that Saviour who presides over all. Bread at noon! When the evening hour comes, and your head is buzzing with the day's engagements, and your whole nature is sore from the abrasion of rough life, and you see a great many duties you have neglected, then commune with Christ, asking His pardon, thanking Him for His love. That would be a queer evening repast at which there was no bread. This is the nutriment and life of the plain Gospel that I recommended you. But alas for the famine-struck! Enough corn, yet it seems you have no sickle to cut it, no mill to grind it, no fire to bake it, no appetite to eat it. Starving to death, when the plain is golden with a magnificent harvest! (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *The cessation of the manna:*—The special supply ceased with the special demand. They were not to look for extraordinary relief when, with due diligence on their part, the ordinary would suffice. This fact suggests some important points with regard to the government of God.

1. There is no wastefulness in the Divine economy. God does not use extraordinary means where the ordinary will avail to accomplish His purposes. We can easily conceive how, out of a prodigality of power, the manna might have been continued long after the land of Canaan had been reached; it might have been argued that such a continuance would be very helpful to the Israelites, supplying them with a perpetual and visible reminder of God's care for them. The answer is, that at any rate such a continuance was not granted; and further, that it is not our Father's way to permit the repetition of an aid the absolute necessity for which has departed. He is glorious in giving, but there is with Him no expenditure which would only tend to produce in the long run a contempt for His daily, His common, His highest, gifts. This principle is of widest application. When the Lord Jesus came to establish His kingdom, He wrought miracles in abundance; but when in the course of time the Church became firmly established, and the truth of the gospel was made evident by its renewing power over men, then the miracles gradually ceased, and that not because the Church had gone backward, but because she had advanced, and her claims could rest upon proofs of a more spiritual order. This principle receives a yet further illustration in the fact that, whilst the Lord displays His power, He yet takes up the work directly only when man is compelled to lay it down. The manna of the desert did not supplant the sowing and reaping of Canaan. Christ will raise the little child to life, but her parents must find her something to eat. Christ will speak the word of power, only possible to Him, "Lazarus, come forth," but human hands must roll away the stone, and unbind the grave-clothes from the man risen from the dead. An angel struck the fetters from the limbs of Peter, and brought him out of the prison, but after that the apostle must put forth his own efforts in order to escape the rage of his persecutors. In all these cases a Divine power might have accomplished the whole transaction; but it did not, and it does not now. God is pleased in His mercy to give to us certain powers, all His and yet ours, ours and yet His, and it is for us diligently to use them. In no impious sense we may say that God helps those who help themselves. We have seen that there is with God no useless expenditure. He does what is sufficient, but not more than sufficient, for the occasion. Now, if that be true, how vast in His eyes must be the needs of sinners, how heavy the task of saving them, that in order to its accomplishment it was needful that the Lord Jesus should come to suffer and die. The greatness of the Redeemer argues the magnitude of the work of redemption. 2. But further, whilst there is no waste in the Divine economy, yet there are special provisions for special occasions. There is here, if we can lay hold of it, a truth for us, full of real comfort, instinct with hope. What was the case of the Israelites? It was this. By no ingenuity, by no conceivable diligence upon their part, could the necessities of the vast host of men, women, and children have been supplied in the wilderness, and yet these very necessities arose because at the command of the Most High the journey from Egypt to Canaan had been undertaken. That is, it was the path of duty which was thus beset with difficulty. That being so, the Israelites could rightly look up to God to have their wants supplied. If the Lord Jesus bids a dozen men supply five thousand with bread, He Himself multiplies the tiny store until there is enough and to spare. If He commands a paralytic to take up his bed and walk, He gives the strength by which the command can be accomplished. The manna given to the Israelites in the sandy desert is a symbol of the most helpful truth, that God will not fail us in any difficulty that may come to us in doing His will. Our principal business is not to perplex ourselves with a thousand questions as to how we may accomplish this or that; our anxiety should gather about an earlier point and a simpler—namely, what is the path of duty—have we a right to enter upon such and such manifest duties and burdens? If the command is plain, let us obey. If God point the way, then, even if it visibly lead into perplexing responsibilities, expectant faith is the highest reason, and the soundest wisdom is hope in Him. Yes, without doubt, we have a right to look for special supplies for special needs. 3. There remains one more truth necessary for the completion of the subject before us, namely, that, on the whole, the ordinary conditions are the highest, the best, the most abiding. Which was really the best state, the wandering or the settlement, the desert or Canaan? And yet the first condition was that of manifold miracles, the water from the rock, the pillar of cloud and of fire, the daily manna; the latter, that in which the people were handed over to the ordinary conditions of life—they had to sow and till and reap, to buy and sell, even as we. The new convert has experiences which by and by yield to firmer principles; his love may deepen and become

infinitely stronger in its influence upon him, and yet some of the peculiar brightness of the early days may have departed. There are times of great exaltation, of movement, of excitement, in the history of churches, but it has yet to be proved that these are indeed, all things considered, the best. I have much faith in quiet, plodding work in our churches, in the continuous use of such means of grace as God gives us, the common corn of the land. I have much faith too in the power of a quiet, steady Christian life, which is regularly fed with the Word of God and with prayer. The exaltation of the special above the ordinary has even served to keep men from accepting Jesus Christ, by obscuring the simplicity of that faith by which we are saved. (*E. Medley.*) *Divine giving and withholding:*—I. THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD TO HIS FRIENDS. II. GOD WILL NOT WORK MIRACLES WHEN HE CAN MEET HIS CHILDREN'S NEEDS BY ORDINARY METHODS. III. A TEMPORAL BLESSING IS SOMETIMES REMOVED WHEN IT HAS WROUGHT THE DESIRED SPIRITUAL END. (*W. Harris.*) *The old gospel or the new?*—In the pulpit of our times we have two different gospels, each calling itself Christian and each asserting its superior excellence. The one is satisfied to rest on the testimony of God, to stand by the old landmarks, to receive the traditions of Scripture as delivered by prophets and apostles, and with these to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. The other, or new gospel, sets out from the principle that Christianity, like any other system of human knowledge, is an evolution and development. There is no absolute standard of truth back in the past; the only standard is in man himself—the highly educated man of the present, the advanced and incomparable man of the future. Some things are all the better for being new. But religion is not one of them. In a world of doubt and uncertainty, it is no small proof of the truth and excellence of the gospel that it is so old, that it has been so long tried and so fully tested—tried and tested in the crucibles of experiment, in the very fires of persecution. 1. This is the gospel which first converted the world. It was not liberalism, but the doctrine of Christ's atonement for sin and the baptism of the Holy Ghost, which converted the three thousand sinners of Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Will any one tell us how long it would have taken the rose-water gospel of our modern *dilettante* to have done this work? 2. It is this old gospel alone that has sustained the Christian martyrs of all ages and all lands under their trials and persecutions. Who cares for science, literature, or art, when racked with pain and passing through the valley and shadow of death? Talk to us of God, tell us of heaven, show us the way to God and heaven, is then the high and only demand. 3. It was the preaching of this old gospel that awakened the Church to new life and produced the great reformation of the sixteenth century. It was as life from the dead, and Pentecostal baptism from heaven, when God raised up the great reformers, and by His grace enabled them, with a restored Bible, to proclaim again from the pulpit and the press the grand distinguishing truths of the ancient faith. 4. This again is the only gospel that has ever founded and sustained missions to the heathen. The new gospel of moderatism, of sentiment and art, or philosophical superiority to all creeds as equally good or indifferent, has never aspired to the dignity of converting the world to Christ. 5. Other grounds might be added for adherence to the old gospel—as that it has produced all the greatest characters in history, has founded all the great institutions of Christendom, has caused all the great revivals of religion in the Church, has been adorned by all the greatest preachers and evangelists of all ages—in a word, has accomplished nine-tenths, if not ninety-nine hundredths, of all the good that has thus far been accomplished in the world. (*Prof. Leroy J. Halsey.*) *Miracle and the commonplace:*—It is a strange thing to read that when at last the long-promised land had been attained there should be a diminution of the splendour of that Divine assistance which had attended the chosen people throughout their wanderings in the wilderness. "The manna ceased on the day after they had eaten the old corn of the land." That is to say, the experience of the Israelites was one which swept down from the experience of splendid and wonderful works into that of ordinary, commonplace operation of the laws of nature. It looks a backward step. We, too, envy those who lived in the days when manna fell from heaven and the water came forth from the smitten rock, when the Jordan was cleft in twain, and men, without striking a blow, felt that the Divine arm was outstretched on their behalf. Or our thoughts may go back to the life of Him who lived in the world, not merely the life of beauty, but the life of power, and we may envy those who were privileged to walk at His side and see His hand stretched forth to touch the leper and he was healed, to raise the dead to life again. The dawn of early life has passed away, and with it the splendour of the morning, and all that we may

claim is to live in a light which has faded down to the mere light of common day. It is a step downwards, we say, from those days of wondrous power to the days in which we can trace but little of the Divine in our midst. My purpose is to ask you to notice that so far from this transition from the extraordinary to the ordinary being a step downwards in the education of human beings it is distinctly a step upwards: that the whole story, if we will read it aright, may show us that God is leading us to far clearer and more constant manifestations of Himself. Your life and mine is real and strong in proportion as it is filled with a clear conception of God, in proportion as it is full of spiritual vigour within, and in proportion as it is energetic towards those whom we meet abroad. In those three relationships life finds its perfection. It does not find its perfection in itself alone; it is related by origin with God. And therefore it cannot grow out in fruition and in perfection of beauty at all except in certain conscious relationship to Him. It cannot ripen in the mere consciousness of God, because we are moral beings and we must ripen within ourselves; neither can we ripen within ourselves without relationship to our fellow-men, for God has put us in the midst of those men where the very order of things is a social order; and we grow not merely by the law of our own inward development, but we grow also by the law of contact and association with our brother men. And if you will look at this story which tells us of the transition from the marvellous to the commonplace, I think you will see that whether you regard life from any one of these three points you are asked to take a step forward and to move higher. 1. First, then, the relation we bear to God. The thought which underlies our regret when we say that we wish we had lived in the days of more marked interposition of God is this—that somehow or another wherever there is a marvellous or miraculous manifestation of God there is an opportunity of knowing Him which is denied to us. If you will reflect you will see that on the contrary the demand that underlies our thought is a demand which is destructive of our conception and consciousness of God sooner or later. What are we saying? We are saying in effect this: we want to be back in the old days of miracle, and we want the Divine made known to us through His marvels. What is that but saying, "O Lord, Thou hast made the world, and Thou hast made the world according to order, and laws govern that world. Break Thy laws that we may know Thee!" But surely that is to demand almost an impossibility! It is an admission that we have but little conception of the Divine working at all. You and I can see immediately what would be the result. That which happens constantly ceases to be extraordinary from the nature of the case, and there would be no more reason for believing in God because of such frequent manifestations of a startling character, for they would no longer be of the very character which we plead is their essential power. But you say, "We do not want Him to do this; we do not want Him to show Himself thus by for ever breaking up His laws, and being for ever doing the thing which we now deem extraordinary, but we do ask Him to break the silence and let us see some startling manifestation of His presence." And then that means to say that we should only realise Him in proportion as He came and stood beside us veiled in these splendours. What, then, would be our inheritance in God? We should have an occasional God, not a permanent one. If we have any vivid conception of Him, He must be a permanent and a perpetual God to our lives and our souls. What you and I want is not a God of occasional work, but the God of a perpetual working in our midst. Therefore, surely we are enlarging our thoughts of God when we say, "God is not only in the startling things, but He is in the commonplace things, of life; God is not only in the cleft rock, He is also in the quiet hill and in the soft meadow; He is not only in the cloven sea or the Jordan struck asunder, but He is in the little burn that babbles at our feet." Surely that gives us a much larger and nobler idea of the Divine; that brings us into closer relationship with Him. It enlarges our conceptions; we feel that we live not in a world which now and then is privileged to behold God as a ruler, marching in stately procession through His universe, but rather as the Father of His children who dwells with them at all times. He is about our path and our bed; His tender mercies never fail to the sons of men, but are over all His works. 2. But life is not merely made up thus of the conceptions which we have of God, but it is made up of our own personal growth. The object which God has, if I may speak with all reverence, in putting us into this little world for the three score years and ten is not to secure our happiness nor to startle us into a kind of hysterical perception of His presence, but to educate us as His children. And therefore, when we ask that God should make Himself manifest by these miracles and wonders, we are really making a false conception of our own powers and

capabilities in relation to God. For by what faculty do you perceive God? For everything that we look at is apprehended by one faculty or other that we possess. Do I expect to apprehend Him by the physical eye? Do I imagine that I shall apprehend Him by intellectual effort? Surely those are only conceptions which belong to past ideas, crude notions of God. I cannot perceive God by the physical eye. God is a spirit! I cannot perceive God by my intellectual powers, because the world, by wisdom, knew not God, and if He be God at all to me He is the Incomprehensible One. Then, of course, the miracle and the wonder are outside the case, for the marvellous can only speak on the plane of things physical or appeal to the power of the mind, the intellectual power within us. Our Lord was constantly teaching that. In His parable of Dives and Lazarus He uses the very principle. Here the man in his torment imagines that a wonder will convince his brethren. "Send Lazarus! Let the marvel appear!" And the only answer is, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead"—in other words, if they have not the moral capacity to follow the teachings of Moses and the prophets, if they have no moral affinity and sympathy with the prophets' teaching, no wonder will give them that capacity. You cannot create a capacity by a wonder outside a man. You cannot make a blind man see red because he cannot see pink; you cannot, by intensifying a force outside, give him a faculty which is lacking in himself. The way in which you can understand God is by the exercise of your moral faculties. Jesus Christ was the greatest moral teacher that ever lived, and what is Jesus Christ's emphatic statement concerning this? He says there are two faculties by which God can be apprehended, one is single-mindedness, the other purity of heart. For so, He said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." That was His idea, and John, the beloved disciple who laid his head upon the bosom of the Christ, uttered the same principle when he said that the only way by which God could be apprehended was by the exercise of a loving disposition. A loving disposition is indispensable. You cannot perceive Him without it, and you can understand why. The reason is written down on the very surface. How can you understand him whose nature is loving if you be not loving also? How can you understand him whose nature is simple-minded if you too are not simple-minded? The faculty by which you apprehend God, then, is not the intellectual, not the physical, but the moral; and hence how will a miracle affect your moral faculties? How can it appeal to your moral powers? So that when you have asked that you should have a miracle to show you God, the answer of the thought and the answer of the principle is the same, you cannot so apprehend God unless you previously possess the moral faculty to enable you to grasp Him. And if you will reflect upon it, this is only another way of saying what is true of everything in the world, that the one condition by which you can understand anything or anybody is that you shall be in some degree a sharer of their nature. That is true! Let us picture to ourselves the tourist who hurries across the Atlantic, and hurries through the towns of Europe in order to see or "to do" the Continent. Place him down with his erratic mind untrained before the greatest masterpieces of art; plant him in the chapel at Florence; let him stand face to face with Michael Angelo's creations of Night and Morning. His first impression will be, "These are greatly over-praised; why, the very anatomy is faulty; I cannot see why people should praise these things." But now for a moment imagine that there drops upon that man's soul as he stands there some little portion of Michael Angelo's nature. What a transformation takes place within his soul in his power of perception at that moment! Then he says something new; then these "greatly over-praised" figures begin to have a message for him; they seem to speak into his life now because Michael Angelo is in his soul, and he can read what Michael Angelo meant. I put it to you in your homes; measure your acquaintances, tabulate them in your own mind, and see what the result is. Only where there is that sort of affinity you can really enter into the capacity of knowing one another in the true friendly sense; and what is the secret of it all? Your power of knowing and entering into the lives of these people depends upon your sharing in some degree their nature. It is the same surely with God. We talk of knowing God. How blind and foolish we are! Knowing God, the measureless, pure God, the bright and eternal God, the God whose mercy is over all His works. How can we know Him if we be not righteous? How can we understand Him if we be not holy? How can we enter into His love if no love dwells within our soul? It is the moral faculty, it is the possession of these moral qualities which are power.

Hence, when the message comes to you, "Go forward! rest no longer upon the miracle! Rest now upon the ordinary manifestations!" it is as if it said—and the message came to the Israelites as it comes to you and me—"You are no longer in a state of babyhood, dependent upon these things outside your moral nature." "You must give moral co-operation"—that is the meaning of the message. You must give moral co-operation now in your own education, for only by that moral co-operation can there be a pure apprehension of the Divine and the real entering into communion with Him. Thus, then, it is a step upwards, is it not? a step upwards in the moral education of men. But there is a third aspect of life. 3. Your life and mine is a life of association with others, and so long as men were in the state in which they were surrounded by the marvellous, the manna fell just where they could gather it without any exertion, but the corn needed to be sown, and the corn needed to be gathered in the spot where it grew, and therefore the children of Israel were now in the position of being made co-operators in the work of God. And so it is for you and me to understand that the advantage of its coming in that way is that it draws us into partnership with the work, and we are promoted to a stage higher when we are sent into the fields to gather, and when we are made so far co-agents with God that in the great work of the distribution of His food amongst men we take our share. (*Bp. Boyd Carpenter.*) *Old corn:*—The old corn eaten by the Israelites was to them a verification of the Divine promise. Abraham was a pilgrim in Canaan, but he could mentally claim the whole land for his descendants. When Lot left him for the rich plain of the Jordan, the Lord said to him (Gen. xiii. 14–16). This was a great promise for the patriarch; also for his son and grandson, to whom it was in substance repeated. But what about those Israelites in Egypt whose hands and faces were smeared with the clay of the brickyards? There were probably times when they thought the promise was forgotten. But the promise was not forgotten, and every grain of the old corn eaten by the Israelites was a proof of God's fidelity to His word. We are reminded by corn, whether old or new, that God is an active power in the world. We may talk about germination and the fructifying influences of dew, rain, and sunshine; but behind all secondary causes there is the great First Cause. In Tibet there is a sacred tree which is said to bear on its leaves hymns, litanies, and pictures of Buddha. On grains of corn, if we look aright, we shall see psalms in praise of God's truthfulness and pictures of God's goodness. He whose finger has yearly given a vitalising touch to the seed in the ground, and shown His beneficence in a long succession of harvests has not failed, and will not fail, in either His threatenings or His promises. The corn eaten by the Israelites was old, and therefore good corn. If it had been badly harvested it would have sprouted, and when parched or made into cakes would have lacked the right flavour. It was in prime condition, and so was a treat to the Israelites after their long diet of manna. In the Bible we have what may be spoken of as old corn. The truths which God has given for the nourishment of our souls are not of recent date, but bear the impress of primitive years. We are not to despise those truths because they are old; if they are old, they are a glory for modern times. Whenever the Church has risen to new life, it has been because of a return to biblical beliefs and biblical methods of activity. When, however, the Church has become little more than a gorgeously decorated petrifaction, it has been revived by the old corn of simple doctrine. Novelties in theology may be attractive, but they cannot do for us what is done by doctrines which are ancient without being antiquated, and venerable without being enfeebled by years. Much as men have grown in science and literature, they have not so grown religiously as to be independent of the atonement. We need the old truths, and we can no more do without them for our souls than we can do without bread made of sound corn for our bodies. (*J. Marrat.*) *The Divine law of economy:*—A law of economy, we might almost say parsimony, prevails, side by side with the exercise of unbounded liberality. Jesus multiplies the loaves and fishes to feed the multitude, but He will not let one fragment be lost that remains after the feast. A similar law guides the economy of prayer. We have no right to ask that mercies may come to us through extraordinary channels when it is in our power to get them by ordinary means. If it is in our power to procure bread by our labour, we dare not ask it to be sent direct. We are only too prone to make prayer at the eleventh hour an excuse for want of diligence or want of courage in what bears on the prosperity of the spiritual life. It may be that of His great generosity God sometimes blesses us, even though we have made a very inadequate use of the ordinary means. But on that we have no right to presume. We are

fond of short and easy methods where the natural method would be long and laborious. But here certainly we find the working of natural law in the spiritual world. We cannot look for God's blessing without diligent use of God's appointed means. (*W. G. Blaikie, D.D.*) *The loss of one kind of advantage is compensated by the advent of another*:—In childhood and early youth we depend for our growth in knowledge on the instructions of our teachers. What puzzles us we refer to them, and they guide us through the difficulty. If they are wise teachers they will not tell us everything, but they will put us on the right method to find out. Still they are there as a court of appeal, so to speak, and we have always the satisfaction of a last resort. But the time comes when we bid farewell to teachers. Happily it is the time when the judgment becomes self-reliant, independent, penetrating. We are thrown mainly upon our own resources. The manna ceases, and we eat the fruit of the land. So in family life. The affection that binds parents and children, brothers and sisters, to one another in the family is both beautiful and delightful; and it were no wonder if, on the part of some, there were the desire that their intercourse should suffer no rude break, but go on unchanged for an indefinite time. But it is seldom God's will that family life shall remain unbroken. Often the interruption comes in the rudest and most terrible form—by the death of the head of the house. It is often a painful and distressing change. But at least it wakens up all who can do anything; it rescues them from the temptation of a slumbering, aimless life, and often draws out useful gifts that turn their lives into a real blessing. And there are other compensations. As old attachments are snapped, new are gradually formed. And even in old age a law of compensation often comes in: children and children's children bring new interests and pleasures, and the green hues of youth modify the grey of age. Then there is the happy experience by which the advent of spiritual blessings compensates the loss of temporal. Such instances are not uncommon as that which the Rev. Charles Simeon gives, in speaking of some blind men from Edinburgh whom nearly a century ago he found at work in a country house in Scotland: "One of the blind men, on being interrogated with respect to his knowledge of spiritual things, answered, 'I never saw till I was blind; nor did I ever know contentment while I had my eyesight, as I do now that I have lost it; I can truly affirm, though few know how to credit me, that I would on no account change my present situation and circumstances with any that I ever enjoyed before I was blind.' He had enjoyed eyesight till twenty-five, and had been blind now about three years." Lastly, of all exchanges in room of old provisions the most striking is that which our Lord thus set forth (John xvi. 7). Very precious had been the manna that ceased when Jesus left. But more nourishing is the new corn with which the Spirit feeds us. Let us prize it greatly so long as we are in the flesh. We shall know the good of it when we enter on the next stage of our being. Then, in the fullest sense, the manna will cease, and we shall eat the corn of the land. (*Ibid.*) *God considerate*:—How gracious is the gentle, thoughtful kindness of God, who lets us see the new before He quite takes away the old, accustoming us to walk before He removes the chair on which we had leant so long, careful that we should be able to swim before He removes the cork. Do not fret if the rhapsodies, and outbursts, and exuberant manifestations of earlier days have ceased; it is better to live by the ordinary laws of human life than by the abnormal and miraculous. And after all there is as much Divine power in the production of a fig and pomegranate, of oil-olive and honey, of barley and wheat, as in the descending manna; as much in the transformation of the moisture of earth and air into the ruddy grape as in the miracle of Cana; as much in the maintenance of the soul in holiness and righteousness all its days as in the communication of unspeakable visions and words that may not be uttered. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*)

Vers. 13–15. **Nay; but as Captain of the host of the Lord.**—*The warrior Christian*:—I. THE SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS VISION TO JOSHUA. "The Lord's host" does not primarily allude to those Israelite armies encamped beside the overflowing waters of the Jordan, but to other and invisible hosts encamped all around on those heights, though no ear ever heard the call of the sentries at their posts of duty, or saw the sheen of their swords flashing in the sunlight, or beheld their marshalled ranks. Those troops of harnessed angels were the hosts of which this wondrous warrior was captain. The story of the conquest of Canaan is not simply the account of battles fought between Israel and the Canaanites, but of the results of a conflict yet more mysterious and far-reaching between the bright

squadrons that follow the lead of the captain of the Lord's host, and the dark battalions of evil entrenched in the hearts and strongholds of the enemies of God. Is it, therefore, any cause for wonder that the walls of Jericho fell down; or that vast armies were scattered without a blow being struck; or that the land was subdued in a seven years' campaign? These achievements were the earthly and visible results of victories won in the heavenly and spiritual sphere by armies which follow the Word of God upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and pure. Those walls fell down because smitten by the impact of celestial hosts. Those armies fled because the dark powers with which they were in league had been put to the rout before the Lord God of Sabaoth. II. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS VISION TO THE CHURCH. Throughout the world of nature there are signs of conflict and collision. There is no pool, however tranquil; no forest-glade, however peaceful; no isle bathed by southern seas, and set gem-like on the breast of ocean, however enchanting; no scene, however fascinating, which is not swept by opposing squadrons contending for victory. The swift pursue their prey, the strong devour the weak, the fittest alone survive in the terrific strife. So it has been in the history of our race. The books that contain the records of the past are largely records of wars and decisive battles. Their pages are wet with tears and blood. The foundations of vast empires have been laid, like those of African palaces, on the writhing bodies of dying men. For the student of God's ways all this leads up to a more tremendous struggle between darkness and light, evil and good, Satan and our King. And here is the real importance of the ascension, which was the worthy climax of the wonders of the first advent, as it will introduce the glories of the second. III. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS VISION TO OURSELVES. We sometimes feel lonely and discouraged. The hosts with which we are accustomed to co-operate are resting quietly in their tents. No one seems able to enter into our anxieties and plans. Our Jerichos are so formidable—the neglected parish, the empty church, the hardened congregation, the godless household. How can we ever capture these, and hand them over to the Lord, like dismantled castles, for Him to occupy? That problem at first baffles us, and appears insoluble. Then we vow it shall be untied, and summon all our wit and energy to solve it. We study the methods of others and copy them; deliver our best addresses and sermons, put forth herculean exertions. We adopt exciting advertisements and questionable methods, borrowed from the world. Suppose Israel had taken lessons in scaling walls and taking fenced cities from the Canaanites! Or that the people had made an attack on Jericho with might and main, determined to find or make a breach! Finally, in our hours of disappointment, when we have tried our best in vain, and have fallen, as the sea-birds who dash themselves against the lighthouse tower fall to the foot with broken wing, it is well to go forth alone, confessing our helplessness, and tarrying for the vision, for we shall then be likeliest to see the Captain of the Lord's host. He will undertake our cause, He will marshal His troops and win the day, He will fling the walls of Jericho to the ground. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *The armed angel of the covenant appearing to Joshua*:—I. JOSHUA WENT FORTH TO BE ALONE WITH GOD. The hour, thought of for forty years, had now arrived; the campaign was about to begin, and everything devolved upon him. No Moses now to direct him. There was the impregnable fortress before him. A long siege or a speedy capture alike impossible. A dilemma. He knelt for guidance. II. THE LORD CAME TO BE ALONE WITH JOSHUA. 1. To Abram, a wanderer, He appeared as a wayfarer; to Jacob, distressed at the prospect of a conflict with his brother, He appeared as a wrestler who allowed himself to be overcome; and now, to the warrior, He showed Himself as a warrior. This teaches that there is no condition of life in which we shall not find the Lord Jesus in full sympathy with His people. 2. Joshua's doubt whether He was for or against him was soon set at rest. So will yours, if your heart is right with Him. 3. When Joshua knew who He was, he fell upon his face and worshipped. We have a like assurance that Joshua had. "All power is given unto Me." "Lo, I am with you alway." But if this be really given to us by the Holy Ghost, our attitude will be like Joshua's. (1) Deeply reverential (Isa. vi. 5). (2) Entirely submissive to the Divine will (Acts ix. 6). 4. The first thing the Lord required—"Loose thy shoe," &c. So now, "Leave worldly cares, cut off carnal indulgences, and give yourself up wholly to Me." "And Joshua did so. . . . And the Lord said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand, Jericho," &c. A similar promise is given to us. Jericho is a type of the world (John xvi. 33; Rom. viii. 31; 1 John iv. 4). The promise was definite: "I have given." That set Joshua's mind at rest. Have we not many a promise as definite? Why should we

fear? (see 1 John v. 4). 5. But faith does not mean sitting still and doing nothing. The land was given to them, but they had to conquer every foot of it. The Christian conflict is no less a conflict because "a fight of faith." In order to conquer in "the good fight of faith," we want—1. The readiness of faith, which is found only in our realised perfect standing in Christ. 2. The prayer of faith. 3. Faith's recognition of the Divine presence. 4. Faith's reverential submission to the Divine will. 5. Faith's energetic obedience to the Divine commands. (*W. J. Chapman, M.A.*) *The Captain of the Lord's host still with us*:—We see in Joshua an observant man meditating over the plans of the morrow, and turning in upon his own thoughts and reflections, yet quick to note the presence of a danger. Every commander of men must have an eye in his head. He must be quick to note the presence of a foe or to detect danger. He must watch as well as meditate and pray. Joshua was quick to take in his surroundings, while he carefully weighed problems which pressed themselves upon him. What was he to do? It was when face to face with that perplexing question that Joshua looked up and saw an armed man. Could he let that man go unchallenged? Nay, he must have the courage to go up to him. That courage was the necessary condition of the revelation which Joshua was about to receive. The cowards in the Lord's army never receive such a vision as this, but the men who have forgotten themselves in their desire to serve their Lord. Now observe what Joshua first received. He received a clear revelation that the One to whom he had spoken was far greater than he had ever imagined Him to be. In other words, that the Captain of the Lord's host, who alone could ensure victory, was nearer to him than he had ever dreamed. Again, notice that the character of this revelation was adapted to the nature of the circumstances by which Joshua was surrounded. Now, when God appeared to Moses, He did not reveal Himself in the form of an armed man. He appeared to him in a flame of fire—a flame which lit up the bush, but did not consume it. Then God appeared in the mystery of fire: and that was just the kind of revelation that Moses needed. But now things were different. Joshua had to pass through experiences through which even Moses had not to pass. The religion of God had been now established. The law had been given, even the ceremonial instructions had been supplied; but now the nation had to find their way into the possession of the promised land. God had given them Canaan, it is true, but it was only on condition that they should, in His strength, conquer the inhabitants of Canaan. Thus the revelation which Joshua needed now was that God would fight for them and with them. He therefore appeared before Joshua, not as a flame of fire, but an armed man, with His sword unsheathed. Joshua thus learnt that the result of the conflict was not dependent upon his wisdom in planning, or upon his courage in prosecuting the campaign. This was supremely all Joshua needed to know. It is this that gives courage to all the true servants of the Lord—the assurance that they have merely to obey the command of their King in detail, leaving all the rest with Him. Next observe that the conditions of being permitted to receive any command from the Divine Captain are reverence and faith. No man can receive from Him orders for battle until he has learned to take the warrior's sandal from off his foot and bow in submissiveness before the great Captain of his salvation. It was when Joshua had learned the truest reverence, when he had realised that the very place upon which he stood was holy, that the great secret was given him how to take Jericho. The Lord bade Joshua order the priests first of all take the ark, and then command seven priests to blow the "seven trumpets of ram's horns" before the ark of the Lord, &c. That was an extraordinary command, and an extraordinary assurance, and they required very exceptional faith in God to act upon them. But the possession of that faith was the condition of victory. So is it still; if we have a similar faith, the triumph is ours. Now think for a moment of Joshua's thoughts after all this. He would soliloquise: "I have mourned over the loss of Moses: I mourn over it still; but now I see as I never did before that there is One who can make up for that loss. I have not to look to Moses, but to the Master who gave Moses his commission: and if obeying His command is all that is necessary for me, I too can be leader." The Lord's cause does not depend upon the life of any hero, however great he may be, and the prosperity of the gospel the wide world over shall not be restrained by any loss, but as long as the Church is faithful to its privileges and ready to obey the Master's command, we as the Lord's army shall go on conquering and to conquer, until at last the shout of victory will be heard, and every Jericho of worldliness and iniquity will be laid low. (*D. Davies.*) *Timely aid; or, a vision of the Captain of the Lord's host*:—I. THE TIME OF HIS APPEAR-

ANCE. 1. After attending to "religious duties," "circumcision" and the "Passover." Joshua knew what kind of beginning was likely to end well; unlike a number of modern Christians. 2. While pursuing his appointed work. "By Jericho." Probably alone, yet fearless of danger. "By Jericho" for some important purpose. God visits the working man. Moses, Gideon, David, Elisha, sons of Zebedee. The covetous and idle are rarely called by God to great work. II. THE MANNER OF HIS APPEARANCE. 1. As supreme in command: "Captain of the Lord's host." Captain over Joshua. Whatever be our abilities, our titles, or our claims to office, we must yield them all up to the "Captain of the Lord's host." 2. As the very friend Joshua needed—in the character and dress of a soldier. 3. As justifying the war in which he was about to engage. There are wars in which God will engage—against sin and the devil. The victories of the Church are bloodless. 4. As encouraging him to wage it valiantly. "Drawn sword." Ready to take the defensive or the offensive. To Abraham He said, "I am thy shield." To the disciple He said, "Follow Me." III. OUR DUTY IN RELATION TO SUCH AN APPEARANCE. 1. To be found evincing an interest in Israel. "Joshua was by Jericho." 2. To be ready to lay ourselves at Jesus' feet, saying, "What saith my Lord unto His servant." Say anything, Lord, and I will do it. Appoint me any work, and I am ready to perform it. (*W. H. Matthews.*) *The Captain of the Lord's host:*—"Art thou for us or for our adversaries?" There is a great deal in this bold challenge which commends itself to our admiration. Joshua knew of no neutrality in the warfare of God. The stranger must be friend or enemy. Joshua was not like so many Christian soldiers of to-day, who, before declaring their principles, wait to find out their company, trimming themselves to the breeze, very pious with the pious, indifferent with the indifferent, and openly irreligious with the irreligious. But there is something amiss with the question, for it is rebuked. Joshua made the mistake of thinking of the warfare in which he was engaged as having the two sides—"our side" and "the other side." Whoever approached the host must come to aid "us" or oppose "us." And this view was all wrong. It was just like the Homeric idea of the gods descending to earth as partisans in human strifes, Apollo patronising the diligent offerer of hecatombs, Venus favouring this or that one of her mortal kindred. It was like the Romans expecting Castor and Pollux in their van to spread dismay in the opposing hosts. It was an idea of God which the Jews got in a certain stage of their national history, an idea of God as a patron deity, a national divinity, just as Chemosh was the national divinity of Moab. In due time, when the exclusive national spirit had done its work, this idea was destined to be swept away. The vision rebukes it now. "Nay," he says, "not for you, nor yet for your adversaries, am I come, but—as Captain of the Lord's host am I now come." "Not as a partisan," he would say, "but as a Prince am I come. Not such as you deem me am I, a welcome ally or a hated foe, come to mingle in the clash and din of earthly warfare, but as captain of an army in which Israel forms but one tiny battalion, I am come to take my place and give my intructions." What a struggle must have taken place in the mind of Joshua! Was not he the captain, divinely chosen by God, and consecrated by the laying on of the hands of Moses? Did not this matter touch the dignity of his office? At any rate, we may be sure—for Joshua was a man—that it touched his pride. Just as he was so full of plans, perhaps had got everything ready for the attack on Jericho, had seen exactly how this wall was to be scaled, how that apparently impregnable tower was to be battered down, how the troops were to be disposed with the certainty of victory—an unknown One comes to him, levels all his plans to the ground with a word, and proclaims Himself the Captain of the host. Longfellow tells the story of the same conflict in "King Robert of Sicily," but there is a difference. King Robert requires years of humiliation and discipline to bring him to the confession all must make before the Captain; Joshua wins his battle on the spot—a battle which showed his fitness for leadership more than when he fought with Amalek at Rephidim. And he won it, as many of the great battles in the world's history—although they have not scarred the fair fields of earth—have been won—on his knees. No longer looking up, he falls with his face to the earth. Oh, what bitter pain and self-abasement were there in that moment when the strong soldier of Israel bowed himself to the dust! Who can say how hard the struggle was? We are only told that the battle was won. "What saith my Lord unto His servant?" Then the Captain of the Lord's host gives His orders, tells of His plan—not at all like the plans of Joshua—how Jericho is to be taken, not by might or strength of armed men, but by the blast of the Spirit of God toppling down the

stupendous walls in which the heathen Canaanites put their trust. 1. Oh, that we imitated Joshua in his vigilance! We, too, are in the promised land. But Canaan, for us, as for Israel, is a battle-field. Enemies prowl around, mighty fortresses of evil frown before us, and it is only our blindness which prevents us from seeing the momentous issues which depend upon our wakefulness. Do we ponder much and often upon the charge laid upon us? Do we often rise from slumber, leave the host of sleepers, and go out alone to survey the field of the approaching battle? Let us not shrink from challenging the unknown influences which at such times touch our lives. "Try the spirits," says St. John; good or evil, they must be challenged, for God has made us creatures of choice, and He has willed that by choice (and not by instinct) we must obey Him. This is the mark of our manhood, the mark which distinguishes us from the beasts. 2. But let us avoid Joshua's error. There is no "our side" in the matter. There is God's side, and the side against God. The Persian poet, Jellaladeen, tells us that, "One knocked at the Beloved's door, and a voice asked from within, 'Who is there?' and he answered, 'It is I.' Then the voice said, 'This house will not hold me and thee'; and the door was not opened. Then went the lover into the desert and fasted and prayed in solitude, and after a year he returned and knocked again at the door; and again the voice asked, 'Who is there?' and he said, 'It is thyself'; and the door opened to him." All true Christian warriors have, with Joshua, learned this utter renunciation of self. The Jehu spirit, "Come and see my zeal for the Lord," is banished, and the spirit of Paul takes its place, "yet not I, but Christ that dwelleth in me." (*H. H. Gowen.*)

The heavenly Captain of the Lord's host; or, the vision at Jericho:—I. THE TIME OF THE VISION. 1. It was immediately after God had been publicly honoured and sought in His ordinances. Christian, wouldst thou see Jesus? Then consecrate thyself anew to the service of thy God, and seek Him in the employment of the means of grace. Especially exercise faith in the Lamb of God, and feed upon the paschal sacrifice in thy heart by faith. Honour thy God by thy devotion, and He shall honour thee by revelations of His glory and His grace. 2. It was immediately before the mighty campaign with the Canaanites. This is often the method of God's procedure. When a great trial is at hand, great revelations of His glory; transporting experiences of His presence are given in anticipation. It was thus with our Divine Master Himself. Before His temptation, the heavens were opened to His view; the Spirit descended upon Him in bodily shape; the audible voice of the Father declared that Father's love, relationship, and approval of Him. It was thus, again, that the disciples were strengthened to bear the trial to their faith in the betrayal, suffering, and death of Jesus. II. THE ASPECT OF THE VISION. Joshua's question is not the utterance of doubt and distrust, but rather of a hope and an expectation that crave a fuller confirmation. It is like the prayer of David, "Say unto my soul, 'I am thy salvation.'" Oh, it is a solemn thing to see the naked sword in the hand of the destroying angel standing over against us: a petition for a reassuring word from Him who wields that sword is no disgrace to a believer. A humble soul that is taught of God to know what sin is must ofttimes be conscious of sin and guilt enough to justify a prayer for a renewal of assurance, and to prompt the anxious question, "Art Thou for us, or for our adversaries?" III. THE COMMUNICATION OF THE VISION. Lessons: 1. Let unsaved sinners read here a lesson of terror and alarm, and heed the call to repentance. His sword is in His hand. But still, still His long-suffering mercy defers the stroke of judgment. Wilt thou not repent and believe the gospel? 2. To those who have accepted His offer of grace, and who plead His precious blood as their title to pardon, there is nothing to dread in the person of their Saviour. Do you belong to the Lord's host? Then bow your heads and worship, for as Captain of the Lord's host is He now come. Say, can you trust this heavenly Guardian? Will you follow this heavenly Guide? He claims these of us all—full confidence, entire obedience. 3. Note that while God's people are reassured and delivered from the fear that hath torment, there is a reverence and godly fear, from which they are not excused, but with which it is their duty to approach their Saviour. This is the symbolism of the loosing of the shoe. (*G. W. Butler, M.A.*)

Captain of the Lord's host:—I. THE RELATION HERE INDICATED BETWEEN CHRIST AND HIS PEOPLE. Ruler, Defender, and Leader of the Church on earth. 1. This He is by virtue of the sufferings and conquests of Calvary. 2. By the free choice of His people. II. THE CHARACTER AND OFFICE IN WHICH JESUS HERE MANIFESTS HIMSELF. Warrior with drawn sword (Rev. i. 16). III. THE POSITION AND DUTY DEVOLVING UPON CHRISTIANS IN CONSEQUENCE OF THIS RELATION TO CHRIST. The true ideal of the

Christian is not that of the shepherd with crook and pipe on sunny hillside; or even that of the pilgrim slowly toiling on, and leaning on his staff; but rather that of the soldier, with shield and helmet, fighting his way against doubts that agitate his mind, against fears that even disturb the serenity of hope, against fiery passions that threaten to overmaster his patience, against the flesh in all its varied forms of opposition to the Spirit, against the world and its allurements, against invisible enemies, &c. Over and above these single-handed conflicts with our foes, we are called upon as soldiers of the Cross to march forward with the host against envy, and wickedness, and sin; to fight for the overthrow of Satan's stronghold, at home and abroad. IV. CHRIST'S RELATION TO THE CHURCH INVOLVES THE ASSURANCE OF ALL NEEDED GRACE AND POWER FOR THE WARFARE. We have His word to direct us, His Spirit to give strength and guidance, His love to inspire us with zeal, His promise to assure us that the conflict shall end in victory. (*A London Clergyman.*)

Joshua's vision:—I. REALISE THE FACT OF THE DIVINE PRESENCE. Jesus Himself comes to this holy war. Joshua saw a man clad in armour, equipped for war. Cannot the eyes of your faith see the same? There He stands, Jesus, God over all, blessed for ever, yet a man. Not carnally, but still in real truth, Jesus is where His people meet together. Joshua saw Him with His sword in His hand. Oh, that Christ might come in our midst with the sword of the Spirit in His hand; come to effect deeds of love but yet deeds of power; come with His two-edged sword to smite our sins, to cut to the heart His adversaries, to slay their unbelief, to lay their iniquities dead before Him. The sword is drawn, not scabbarded, as alas! it has been so long in many Churches, but made bare for present active use. It is in His hand, not in the minister's hand, not even in an angel's hand, but the sword drawn is in His hand. Oh, what power there is in the gospel when Jesus holds the hilt, and what gashes it makes into hearts that were hard as adamant when Jesus cuts right and left at the hearts and consciences of men! The glorious man whom Joshua saw was on his side. In the midst of His Church, Christ carries a sword only for the purposes of love to His people. The Divine presence, then, is what we desire, and if we have it faith at once is encouraged. It was enough for the army of Cromwell to know that He was there, the ever victorious, the irresistible, to lead on his Ironsides to the fray. Many a time the presence of an old Roman general was equal to another legion; as soon as the cohorts perceived that he was come whose eagle eye watched every motion of the enemy, and whose practised hand led his battalions upon the most salient points of attack, each man's blood leaped within him, and he grasped his sword and rushed forward secure of success. Our King is in the midst of us, and our faith should be in active exercise. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" When the King is with His people, then hope is greatly encouraged, for saith she, "Who can stand against the Lord of hosts?" Where Jesus is, love becomes inflamed, for oh! of all the things in the world that can set the heart burning, there is nothing like the presence of Jesus. A glimpse of Him will overcome us, so that we shall be almost ready to say, "Turn away Thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me." Suppose that Christ is here. His presence will be most clearly ascertained by those who are most like Him. Joshua was favoured with this sight because he alone had eyes that could bear it. I would that all of you were Joshuas; but if not, if but some shall perceive Him, we shall still receive a blessing. I am sure this presence of Christ will be needed by us all. Go not to warfare at your own charges, but wait upon your Master, tarrying at Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high. But Jesus Christ's presence may be had. Do not despond and say that in the olden times the Master revealed Himself, but He will not do so now. He will, He will. His promise is as good as ever. II. UNDERSTAND THE LORD'S POSITION IN THE MIDST OF HIS PEOPLE. "As Captain of the host of the Lord am I now come." What a relief this must have been for Joshua. Perhaps he thought himself the captain; but now the responsibility was taken from him; he was to be the lieutenant, but the King Himself would marshal His hosts. Wherever Christ is, we must recollect that He is Commander-in-chief to us all. We must never tolerate in the Church any great man to domineer over us: we must have no one to be Lord and Master save Jesus. Down with thee, self, down with thee! Carnal judgment and foolish reason, lie still! Let the Word of God be paramount within the soul, all opposition being hushed. If we do not act with the Captain, disappointment will be sure to follow. One action brought defeat upon Israel. III. Our third rule is, WORSHIP HIM WHO IS PRESENT WITH US. Joshua, it is said, fell on his face to the earth. Worship is the highest elevation of the spirit, and yet the lowliest prostration of the soul. Worship

he Son of God! Then, when you have so done, give up yourself to His command: say to Him, "What saith my Lord unto His servant?" When you have done this, I want you to imitate Joshua in the third thing, namely, put off your shoes from off your feet. Joshua, perhaps, had not felt what a solemn thing it was to fight for God, to fight as God's executioner against condemned men. He must put his shoes off, therefore. We never can expect a blessing if we go about God's work flippantly. IV. To conclude, let us now ADVANCE TO ACTION, according to the Master's command. Unconverted men and women, you are our Jericho, we wish to conquer you for Christ. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The Captain of the Lord's host:*—I. A TRANSIENT REVELATION OF AN ETERNAL TRUTH. You will observe that there run throughout the whole of the Old Testament notices of the occasional manifestation of a mysterious person who is named "the Angel," "the Angel of the Lord," and who, in a remarkable manner, is distinguished from the created hosts of angel beings, and also is distinguished from, and yet in name, attributes, and worship all but identified with, the Lord Himself. If we turn to the New Testament, we find that there under another image the same strain of thought is presented. The Word of God, who from everlasting "was with God, and was God," is represented as being the Agent of Creation, the source of all human illumination, the director of Providence, the Lord of the Universe. "By Him were all things, and in Him all things consist." So, surely, these two halves make a whole; and the Angel of the Lord, separate and yet so strangely identified with Jehovah, who at the crises of the nation's history, and stages of the development of the process of revelation, is manifested, and the Eternal Word of God, whom the New Testament reveals to us, are one and the same. The eternal order of the universe is before us here. It only remains to say a word in reference to the sweep of the command which our vision assigns to the Angel of the Lord. "Captain of the Lord's host" means a great deal more than the true General of Israel's little army. It does mean that, or the words and the vision would cease to have relevance and bearing on the moment's circumstances and need. But it includes also, as the usage of Scripture would sufficiently show, if it were needful to adduce instances of it, all the ordered ranks of loftier intelligent beings, and all the powers and forces of the universe. These are conceived of as an embattled host, comparable to an army in the strictness of their discipline and their obedience to a single will. It is the modern thought that the universe is a Cosmos and not a Chaos, an ordered unit, with the addition of the truth beyond the reach and range of science, that its unity is the expression of a personal will. That is the truth which was flashed from the unknown like a vanishing meteor in the midnight before the face of Joshua and which stands like the noonday sun, unsetting and irradiating for us who live under the gospel. II. THE LEADER OF ALL THE WARFARE AGAINST THE WORLD'S EVIL. "The Captain of the Lord's host." He Himself takes part in the fight. He is not like a general who, on some safe knoll behind the army, sends his soldiers to death, and keeps his own skin whole. But He has fought, and He is fighting. Do you remember that wonderful picture in two halves, at the end of one of the Gospels, "The Lord went up into heaven," &c. . . . "they went forth everywhere preaching the Word"? Strange contrast between the repose of the seated Christ and the toils of His peripatetic servants! Yes. Strange contrast; but the next words harmonise the two halves of it: "The Lord also working," &c. The leader does not so rest as that he does not fight; and the servants do not need so to fight as that they cannot rest. Thus the old legends of many a land and tongue have a glorious truth in them to the eye of faith, and at the head of all the armies that are charging against any form of the world's misery and sin there moves the form of the Son of Man, whose aid we have to invoke, even from His crowned repose at the right hand of God. If this, then, be for us, as truly as for Joshua and his host, a revelation of who is our true leader, surely all of us in our various degrees, and especially any of us who have any "Quixotic crusade" for the world's good on our consciences and on our hands, may take the lessons and the encouragements that are here. Own your leader. That is one plain duty. And recognise this fact, that by no other power than by His, and with no other weapons than those which He puts into our hands, in His Cross and meekness, can a world's evils be overcome, and the victory be won for the right and the truth. We may have, we shall have, in all enterprises for God and man that are worth doing, need of patience, just as the army of Israel had to parade for six weary days round Jericho blowing their useless trumpets, whilst the impregnable walls stood firm, and the defenders flouted and jeered their aimless procession. But the seventh day will come, and at the trumpet blast down will go the loftiest ramparts

of the cities that are walled up to heaven, with a rush and a crash, and through the dust and over the ruined rubbish Christ's soldiers will march and take possession. Do not make Joshua's mistake. "Art thou for us?" Nay! "Thou art for Me." That is a very different thing. There is a great deal that calls itself, after Jehu's fashion, "my zeal for the Lord," which is nothing better than zeal for my own notions and their preponderance. Therefore we must strip ourselves of all that, and not fancy that the cause is ours, and then graciously admit Christ to help us, but recognise that it is His, and lowly submit ourselves to His direction, and what we do, do, and when we fight, fight, in His name, and for His sake. III. THE ALLY IN ALL OUR WARFARE WITH OURSELVES. That is the worst fight. Far worse than all external foes are the foes that each man carries about in his own heart. In that slow hand-to-hand and foot-to-foot struggle I do not believe that there is any conquering power available for a man that can for a moment be compared with the power that comes through submission to Christ's command and acceptance of Christ's help. He has fought every foot of the ground before us. IV. THE POWER WHICH IT IS MADNESS TO RESIST. Think of this vision. Think of the deep truths, partially shadowed and symbolised by it. Think of Christ, what He is, and what resources He has at His back, of what are His claims for our service, and loyal, militant obedience. Think of the certain victory of all who follow Him amongst the armies of heaven, clad in fine linen, clean and white. Think of the crown and the throne for him that overcomes. Remember the destructive powers that sleep in Him; the drawn sword in His hand; the two-edged sword out of His mouth; the wrath of the Lamb. Think of the ultimate certain defeat of all antagonisms; of that last campaign when He goes forth with the name written on His vesture and on His thigh, "King of kings, and Lord of lords." Think of how He strikes through kings in the day of His wrath, and fills the place with the bodies of the dead; and how His enemies become His footstool. Ponder His own solemn Word, "He that is not with Me is against Me." There is no neutrality in this warfare. Either we are for Him or we are for His adversary. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

A strengthening vision (a Sermon to Soldiers):—The vision described in the text was God's way of teaching Joshua. It revealed to him the important truth, it showed him that the secret source of all splendid achievements was in the strength that comes from the realised union between God and man. When and where did this vision come to Joshua? It was on the eve of an expected battle. At any moment the first blood might be shed. Uncertainty was in every heart. Men recounted to each other as they walked silently about the camp the wonderful doings of Jehovah, their God. These Israelitish soldiers gathered hope from the past for the future, and so stood erect for expected duty. But it was a moment of supreme anxiety, for an untried matter lay before them. It was a moment of supreme anxiety, and heart-sickening suspense to every soldier who stood before that first stronghold they had to attack. What must it be to Joshua the commander-in-chief? Earnest thoughts about his duty, about his responsibility, would surely rise up within him at such a moment, and his heart must well-nigh faint at the difficulties and the dangers. Did ever soldier meet greater encouragement? At that moment, then, when Joshua for the first time was face to face with the difficulties and the dangers of that unexpected campaign, at this place with the grim fortifications frowning round him, this vision of the text appeared. It was an answer to that which was going on within him. It was a striking vision; the appearance of a soldier ready for battle to a soldier. But what did this man with the drawn sword in his hand mean? Joshua knew a conflict was certain, that there was a long and severe campaign before him, but what was it, victory or defeat? What about the issue? The vision leaves Joshua still in uncertainty and doubt, and so with a soldier-like promptness and courage he goes up to the man, and the thought that is in his heart appears at the very abruptness of the question: "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?" That was what Joshua wanted to know. But no direct answer was given; instead came the majestic words: "Nay, but as Captain of the host of the Lord am I now come." I am thy fellow-soldier, but I belong to another army. I was with Moses as a guiding angel; I will be with thee as a soldier, the commander, the orderer of the battle. Thou needst not fear; to thy army there is a reserve of which thou knowest nothing. The Lord of hosts is with thee, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob is on thy side. He arranges all this battlefield: thou needst not fear; thou art safe under His protection. So God spoke to Joshua, and the watchful soldier understood the message that was given to him, he recognised the reviving vision and bowed before the Divine presence. Faith in God is a great inducement to a good heroic life; the enthusiasm of faith is strength: "All things are

possible to him that believeth." But what does this vision of the man with the drawn sword in his hand reveal to us? Surely, first of all we are able to recognise this truth, that a soldier's life ought to be, must be, may be, looked upon as a vocation from God. The essence of an ideal soldier's life is self-sacrifice. To do your work because you must, to do it as slavery, to do as little of it as possible, to get away from it as soon as you can, and then to find your amusement or your pleasure in some wild form of self-indulgence, that is unsoldierlike and wrong. The Cross of Christ is the true symbol of a soldier's life. Self-sacrifice should mark it; duty to God and duty to man is that which lies hidden in its uniform. And again, surely the vision teaches us this, that in like emergencies English soldiers and English commanders may expect the same Divine revelation, a man with a drawn sword in his hand to appear to them. "I never knew," said a cultured Christian officer to me, "I never knew the delight of God's presence, I never realised it so thoroughly, as when in the darkness of the night we were crossing the deserts of Egypt to the unknown dangers of Tel-el-Kebir." And surely in these days of newness, when not only is a new England rising up about us, but a new army with new weapons, and with new modes of warfare and unexplored campaigns in the distance, it behoves us to believe that whenever war comes, if it be undertaken for the good of men and the glory of God, this vision of the man with the drawn sword in his hand will lead our army and inspire our officers and soldiers to noble deeds. This vision came to Joshua, but Joshua had a prepared heart. A man can only see that which he is prepared to see. Such a vision would not come to unprepared souls. Joshua had learned the lessons of fighting successful battles long ago. Years before this the first battle that Israel had ever fought, that at Rephidim, had been gained when Joshua was the leader, the chosen selected leader. An able, young, and capable leader he was then, and the army was made up of picked men. He was brave and enduring, and everything seemed to be on the side of the Israelites, but yet the final force was not with the fighting men, but up on the mountain-side. The final force was in the uplifting of hoary men's hands to God. Moses and Aaron and Hur, old men, stood on the mountain side and supplicated God while the young men fought. How goes the battle, do you want to know? You must watch the hands of Moses. When the hands of Moses are uplifted the children of Israel march grandly on, and when they drop down in their weakness the Amalakites spring forward, and neither good generalship nor hard fighting can keep them back. The secret of all true power is with God. We, men, cannot wipe off evil in our own strength or might, but God will drive it out. Not by a miracle, but He will work through willing men, and do His work thoroughly and well. We know there are difficulties and dangers in a soldier's life, but amid the difficulties and dangers we see deliverance; amid sin we see salvation; with the Cross of Christ before us we will never despair of men. We will never despair, for the Word tells us that Christ came into the world, not to condemn it, but to save it. Then, again, there are surely special times in a soldier's life when he needs special encouragement. There is war with its many horrors, mangled forms, vast heaps of dying and wounded; and at such a moment, in such a crisis, the memory of the Church at home, the hymns sung, the prayers offered, the teaching received, comes back and lightens up the darkest hour of a soldier's life. It tells him of hope in unexplored dangers, and in the last great danger of all, death. I have listened with tearful eyes from all sorts of men's lips of such strength being given them in hours of danger from hymns they have sung. Some thought comes, some stray thought, as it seems, which the Holy Spirit brings into their minds, that in the garrison towns of England prayers are being offered up for them. This thought comes in and gives the man a new gleam of hope, new thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven. There is a touching incident in one of the books which Mrs. Ewing wrote about soldiers. She could enter into their tenderest feelings better than most people. She knew, too, by constant experience with soldiers, what religious associations could do for them, and what a power the Church of Christ, with its hymns, prayers, sacraments, and ministrations, could be to them. Jackanapes lay dying on the battlefield. He had given his life for another, as many a soldier has done. There stood by him his old major. Jackanapes said, "Say a prayer for me, a Church prayer. A Church prayer on parade service, you know." But the old major was not used to prayer and praise, and he could only say, "Jaconite, God forgive me, I am afraid I am very different to what some of you young fellows are." And there was a moment of silence, deep silence and terrible pain, and then the old major said with that charming simplicity which we so often find, "I can only

repeat the little one at the end." Impressed with the conviction that what he could do, it was his duty to do, the old major knelt down and unbared his head and said by the dying boy reverently, loudly, and clearly, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God"—and then Jackanapes died, and how could he die better! God's love came before him at the last supreme moment. Oh, there is many a word heard in the church, heard again and again, falling upon unheeding ears, but which God hears, and which comes up again at God's appointed time. When an English soldier like Joshua has to face unexplored dangers, such words as the soldier hears in the church speaking of the love of God are so valuable. When the soul needs them most, when the man is about to fall into the hands of God, whose character he longs to know, then to recall thoughts of the love of God, it is to such gracious memories as we trust the services in the church will have that he looks. (*J. C. Edgehill, D.D.*) *Jesus our Captain*:—I. OUR LEADER INSPIRES CONFIDENCE. He has never been defeated. In one of the Napoleonic battles on the Peninsula a corps of British troops were sorely pressed and began to waver. Just then the Duke of Wellington rode in among them. A veteran soldier cried out, "Here comes the Duke, God bless him! the sight of him is worth a whole brigade." So to the equipped warrior, under the ensign of the Cross, a sight of Jesus, our Leader, is a new inspiration. II. JESUS IS ABLE TO ASSURE THE VICTORY TO EVERY REDEEMED SOUL WHO IS LOYAL TO HIM. What a bugle-blast that is which sounded from the lips of the heroic apostle (Rom. viii. 37). To be a conqueror is to vanquish our enemies. But to "more than conquer" is to reap a positive, spiritual good from the battle itself. If life had no encounters we would acquire no spiritual sinews. III. EACH ONE OF US HAS A PERSONAL CONFLICT TO WAGE. No other human being can fight it for us. Some have to contend with a powerful passion, some with a besetting sin, some with a temptation from without; others with internal doubts and abominable suggestions by the adversary. IV. JESUS MET AND OVERCAME THE DEVIL. He is able to "destroy his works." 1. Jesus gives us the only armour which can protect us, and with it He gives the strength to wield the weapons. 2. Jesus makes intercession for us when the battle waxes hot. 3. These conflicts bring us into closer, sweeter sympathy with Jesus. 4. He flies to the relief of every redeemed follower who is ready to perish. (*T. L. Cuyler, D.D.*) *Christ the Captain of salvation*:—I. It is important to contemplate the Lord Jesus Christ in THE SOURCE OF HIS AUTHORITY. 1. The authority of the Saviour is founded upon His essential Divinity. 2. While the authority of the Saviour, as the Captain of all the hosts of the Lord, is founded upon His essential Divinity, it is also to be taken as founded upon His mediatorial office. The special charge which He had of the hosts of the Lord, or the tribes of Israel, in another form of manifestation, must be regarded evidently and distinctly as the symbol of that covenant relationship which He holds, throughout all ages of time, to those who constitute the spiritual Israel and God's covenant people, out of every nation, tribe, and tongue. II. THE GLORY OF HIS OBJECTS. 1. These objects are glorious on account of their intrinsic importance. The literal object had in view by the Saviour, in the manifestation of Himself to Joshua, was one of much magnitude—the leading of the tribes of Israel to conquest and to the promised land, so that the promise might be fulfilled to these people, upon which they had been looking now for a long succession of ages. But the Lord Jesus Christ has been revealed as the great Leader of "the sacramental hosts of God's elect"; and it should be observed that this possesses an importance far beyond what, by any human being, hath been conceived, and demands all that can be rendered of the adoration and praise of the universe. 2. These objects are glorious by their extended influence. We are all aware of the influence of extent, either in increasing the evil of what is pernicious or in increasing the value of what is beneficial. According to the number of persons affected by a curse, we assign the magnitude of that curse; and according to the number of persons affected by a blessing, we assign the magnitude of that blessing. Let this principle be applied to the theme on which we now are meditating, and new honour will be found to be given to those objects which are proposed by the great Captain and Leader of the hosts of the Lord. III. THE CERTAINTY OF HIS TRIUMPH. 1. The grounds of this. (1) His Divinity. (2) His promises. 2. We must also recollect that the certainty of this triumph must also be connected with the exercise of certain influences over those minds who are interested in it. And if the triumph we anticipate in connection with our own salvation be secure, one influence to be inspired is that of—(1) Obedience; (2) fortitude; (3) gratitude. (*J. Parsons.*) *The Captain of the Lord's host*:—I. THAT BEFORE UNDERTAKING ANY DIFFICULT

ENTERPRISE, INDEED IN ALL OUR TRIALS AND DISTRESSES, IN ALL OUR WAYS, WE SHOULD DIRECT OUR THOUGHTS TO HEAVEN. Joshua "lifted up his eyes" to heaven, from whence he knew that his help would in due time come. So should our eyes not be lowered to the "earthly, sensual, devilish," but be lifted up to the noble, holy, pure. II. THAT THE HELP OF GOD IS NOT MERELY TO BE PASSIVELY RECEIVED, BUT IS TO BE ACTIVELY SOUGHT FOR. Joshua not only lifted up his eyes: he also "looked." God helps those that help themselves. Men should all be, not merely idle waiters on God's bounty, but really "workers together with Him." III. THAT CHRIST IS EVER READY TO HELP THOSE THAT LOOK TO HIM FOR SUCCOUR. The Captain of the Lord's host "stood over against Joshua with His sword drawn in His hand"—typical of Christ, prepared to afford His omnipotent aid to all who are fighting manfully under His banner, and striving by His grace to continue faithful. IV. THAT WHEN FAITH HAS MADE KNOWN TO US HEAVENLY TRUTHS, REASON MUST DISCLOSE TO US THE EXACT BEARING OF THOSE TRUTHS. "Art thou for us or for our adversaries?" Bringest thou with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell? Be thy intents wicked or charitable? Many a noble human soul, like stately galley, has been lured to destruction by "phantom ships" in "the spirit land." V. THAT IN THE LIGHT OF ETERNITY EARTHLY CONFLICTS ARE PALTRY AND UNIMPORTANT. Sectarianism must cease when Christianity reigns. VI. THAT HONOUR SHOULD BE GIVEN WHERE HONOUR IS DUE. Joshua "fell on his knees," &c. VII. THAT OBEDIENCE IS NOT THE LEAST OF THE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES. When commanded by the Captain of the Lord's host to "loose his shoes," &c., he at once "did so." Obedience is a sign, not of servitude, but of intelligence. (*R. Young, M.A.*) *The true campaign*:—I. THAT IN THE TRUE CAMPAIGN GOD HAS COMMITTED TO MAN A GREAT WORK. 1. An onerous work. We live in a world of evil. Corrupt principles, the mighty "powers of darkness," possess the world. They crowd our sphere of action; and, alas! they are encamped within us. The work to which we are called is their entire extermination, both from within and without. 2. A righteous work. The man who consecrates his energies to the downfall of evil, whose life is one earnest struggle against the principalities and powers of darkness, is acting evermore in accordance with the eternal law of rectitude. He is "fighting the good fight of faith," and if he is faithful he shall receive "a crown of glory that fadeth not away." 3. An indispensable work. Never will you possess the Canaan of spiritual harmony, moral approbation, self-control, uplifting thoughts, heavenly affections, ever-brightening hopes, and free and blessed intercourse with the Infinite Father of spirits, without the expulsion of all evil from your soul. II. THAT IN THE TRUE CAMPAIGN GOD BLESSES MAN WITH A GREAT LEADER. "The Captain of the Lord's host"—Jesus Christ, "the Captain of our salvation." 1. As a moral commander He is ever present when needed. 2. As a moral commander He is always ready. 3. As a moral commander He is all-sufficient. III. THAT IN THE TRUE CAMPAIGN GOD REQUIRES A GREAT SPIRIT. Joshua here displays—1. A spirit of indomitable valour. 2. A spirit of reverent inquiry. 3. A spirit of solemn obedience. (*Homilist.*) *The Captain of the Lord's host*:—Joshua's question, "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?" was a perfectly natural one for him to ask, at the sight of an armed man in an enemy's country; we can scarcely say he did wrong to ask it; but it seems as though the Lord met the question with something like a rebuke. "He said, Nay." It seemed to Joshua that there were two sides, his own and the enemy's, between which the battle was to be fought out: he had to learn that it was not for him nor for Israel to gain the victory, but for the Lord their God. To teach him and all Israel this more plainly, the Lord gave him special commands as to the way the first victory was to be gained, in the taking of Jericho; this was to be done, entirely and plainly, by God and not by man; and for all the war that followed, though more was to depend upon human prudence and courage, they were still to know that they were fighting, not for themselves, but for their Lord; that they were not at liberty to act as they pleased, but were to act in entire obedience to Him. Is not this a lesson which we require to learn in the war we have to fight against the power of sin within and about us? The recognition of this would do something to calm and soothe the bitterness of men's minds about the questions of party that are so fiercely and frequently argued in our days. And as in public and party questions, so the same fault of selfwill comes into men's efforts after goodness in other matters also. Most people sometimes feel it would be easier for them to be good if they were in a different state of life from what they are, if they lived in a different society or neighbourhood, if their family circumstances were different; if they had a different business or employment in life, and the like; and they often set down

their own faults, as far as they are aware of them, to the blame of their neighbours or of the circumstances that they think are the great hindrances to their curing them. This is nothing but claiming to ourselves the right to command the Lord's host, instead of fighting in it as simple soldiers, whose duty only is to obey orders. Are we to expect the Lord to be "for us," not only so that He means and wishes us to get the victory, but so that He shall take every means that we choose to secure it, shall serve under our command, and make bridges over all the steep valleys and roads through all the different passes, and give us the chance of fighting the enemy just on our own ground, when we choose and where we choose? There is one source of difficulty in the way of duty of which it is especially wrong to complain or to want to have it altered so as to suit us, though it is perhaps the commonest of all —I mean the difficulties we find to our own right conduct from the conduct of other people. Here, if we ask whether the Lord is "for us or for our adversaries," the only possible answer is, "For both." He loves both equally. God gave Joshua and the Israelites the victory over the Canaanites only "by little and little," for this reason among others—that He desired to spare the Canaanites themselves as much as possible, and to give them time to repent if they would. Much more is it wrong and selfish for us to want any of our fellow-Christians swept out of our way—to think of them as mere spiritual enemies, or expect God to deal with them as mere temptations to ourselves, and hindrances to our own goodness. Patience and submission to God's will are the foundation of all excellence in the Christian character; just as discipline, and ready and unquestioning obedience are the most important of all qualities in an army of this world. It is when things are against you that your mind is tried and trained; you have to make the best of them, but you are not tempted to "seek great things for yourself"; if you escape disaster you will be satisfied, and that is hard enough. Now it cannot be useless for us to remember in our spiritual war, if we find things are against us, and that the operations in which we are engaged are unsuccessful, that it was under these conditions that the Captain of the Lord's host Himself fought out His great battle on earth. Judging it in a natural way, His life was a failure, His ministry a failure. He had fought the world for God, and had lost the battle. But His faith and obedience did not fail—rather it was perfected by His defeat. He still went on fearlessly until He had finished the work God gave Him to do: then He said, "It is finished!" and bowed His head and gave up the ghost. And then He had conquered. Let us, then, not be discouraged if we find that He gives us work to do that we do not like, or in which we do not see our way to success. It may be only that He means us so to win glory like His own—such as is won by the highest faith in Him, the faith that removes mountains. But whether that be so or not, we have to accept His orders and obey them. Do your duty patiently, and trust God for its having a good event. (*W. H. Simcox, M.A.*) *The vision for the great campaign:*—See the British fleet lying anchored at Spithead. It is in commission for an important expedition. Every ship has orders to be ready to sail at a moment's notice. Accordingly all are ready. Every officer, every man, every boy is aboard. The captains are assured that every preparation is completed; that all stores of every description are laid in; that steam is up, and that in a moment their ships can be under weigh. Why, then, do they not hurry seaward? Is not this delay a waste of precious time? No, for the admiral is not yet on board the flagship. The supreme, responsible, directing mind, on whose energy and ability the whole nation is depending, is not yet at his post. See, here he comes. Every ship acknowledges the little craft that bears his flag; he steps on the quarter-deck of the vessel he commands, the signal for departure is hoisted; all are off. Such an event as that will give some idea of the meaning of this part of the sacred narrative. Israel has received orders to enter on this momentous campaign. All things are ready for a beginning. They have crossed the river; they have been circumcised; they have kept the feast; they have partaken of the corn of the land; why, then, this pause? Because they wait for Him who is their Captain. Here on the plains of Jericho the typical Saviour and the true Joshua and Jesus, stand face to face. Yea, Joshua's work at that time was the work of Jesus; was the work of Jesus so peculiarly and definitely that Joshua must wait on Him for instructions. He who came the lowly Lamb comes here the mighty warrior, with a sword of judgment drawn and gleaming in His awful hand. He who came to save comes to destroy. This vision makes very emphatic what was clearly revealed before, viz., that this campaign is under the Divine sanction and direction. Divine skill plans the work. Divine power carries it forward. I. BEHOLD OUR CAPTAIN. We have a Leader in this great war. We

are not left to fight alone; herein lies our comfort. "He goeth before." We go not a warfare at our own charges. If Joshua was unfit for that conquest of Canaan by himself, how much more are we unfit for the fight against principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places. For Joshua, Jesus came, "The Captain of the Lord's host." For us Jesus comes "the Captain of salvation." And it is a comfort to think that this Leader of the people is one of the people Himself. In any war, which is the captain whom the soldiers love to follow? He who shares their lot most closely—he who, like Skobeleff in the Turkish war, knows all their hardships and privations. He who sleeps with them in the trenches, eats the same coarse and scanty rations, and leads them into the thickest of the fight. Now, this great Captain of whom we speak acts in this very fashion. He has shared our lot in every particular, however hard, sin excepted. Also, like the warrior that appeared to Joshua, our Leader is thoroughly equipped for His work. His hand is drawn ready to smite. The word of truth is the royal weapon He wields in this war of grace and salvation; quick, powerful, sharp, effectual. He puts it in the hands of every faithful follower and bids him use it well. Again, Jesus is our Leader in virtue of Divine appointment: "The government shall be upon His shoulders." "To Him shall the gathering of the people be." Moreover, He is Captain in virtue of His own purchase. Jesus has the right to lead God's people, because He has died for them. He is made perfect, as the Captain of salvation, through suffering. Also He is our leader because of His own resources. These are infinite. Lastly, we would say, He is Leader because of His qualities. He is an able Leader, thoroughly fit to command God's army, a true King of men, always present, always ready. He is faithful to His word; wise in His plans; glorious in His achievements; ravishing in His perfections. II. See here also the FAITHFUL FOLLOWER. We know that Joshua stands prepared to follow this great Captain, because we remember his past obedience. By doing whatever duty comes to hand, under the eye of the great Leader, we prepare for higher achievements. Joshua's heart is also in his work. He is not slothful and indifferent. He is not careless and unconcerned. He is not fearful and oppressed, with no stomach for the fight. Thus the follower of Jesus should be a willing worker, full of energy and watchfulness, ever on the alert to do whatever in him lies to extend the Saviour's kingdom. Joshua is also brave. When this warrior started up before him, though he was startled he was not unmanned. Without moral courage there can be no nobility of character, no strength of soul, no effective work. And this brave man is also humble. He fell on his face before this majestic Presence. He was deeply conscious of the superiority of his Leader and of his own nothingness. Therefore his heart is also filled with reverence. He worshipped before Him. He took the shoes off his feet, for the place was holy. Men who have done anything great for God, men who have followed the Lord fully, have been always marked by a spirit of deepest reverence. The gravity, the solemnity of the work in which they are engaged, the consciousness of the Divine presence before which they walk, fills them with awe. Joshua was also docile and obedient. He put the question, "What wilt Thou have me to do?" And when he got the answer he did as he was commanded. Unquestioning, prompt obedience is due to Him who commands us with such unerring wisdom, who leads us with such invincible might. (*A. B. Mackay.*) *An inspiring vision*:—Constantine, with his young, enthusiastic heart, was setting out on his war campaigns, when, they tell us, the appearance of the sky arrested his attention. As the eyes of the conqueror looked up into the heavens, behold, there seemed shaped to his vision a cross of fire, and beneath it, in letters of flame, were inscribed the Latin words, "*In hoc signo vinces*" ("In this sign thou wilt conquer"). It may have been a dream—it very likely was; but oh, there is truth in it! If you can see the Cross, you have got the vision that ennobles and enlivens, and brings conquering power to you in this life. "Where there is no vision, the people perish"; but when there is a vision—the vision of Calvary, the vision of the Lord Jesus—there is life, there is joy, there is peace, there is blessing. (*J. Robertson.*) *Joshua's vision*:—There are moments when we see without seeking, what at other times does not appear to us, and will not appear. An inward eye that had been closed seems to open, and we stand suddenly in the presence of hitherto invisible things. Midnight, solitude, sorrow, a felt crisis in our lives—what revealings they have brought with them; and it was as though a veil had been rent in twain, as though a flash of lightning had illumined the darkness. We all have our occasional transient visions of something higher, grander, or more solemn than we are ordinarily sensible of. Joshua has now to begin afresh, in fresh

scenes; another period of toil and endurance is opening before him. So we stand to-day upon the threshold of another year, waiting, after we have finished, to commence again. And, as he waited, gravely meditative, with earnest thoughts stirring in him concerning his duties and responsibilities, there came upon him the vision of the text; for, unless he had been meditative and earnest, he would not have beheld what he beheld, we may be sure. It was the shining answer to what was taking place within him. One sees only that which one is tuned and prepared to see; and, to catch inspiring glimpses, one must be aspiring. All things must be met by us half-way. For none but those whose hearts are kindling, does the bush burn with fire. May ours be the inner temper of mind to-day, to which angels of God shall be able to show themselves. But notice first the agitation of uncertainty in the breast of the son of Nun. "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?" wondering anxiously what the apparition meant. You see, this was the form in which the future in the strange country appeared—a mighty man with a drawn sword in his hand. Yes, of course the future would be filled with the clash of war. Nothing but conflict could be expected; conflict perhaps, severe and prolonged; but what of the issue? with whom would the victory lie? with Israel or the enemy? Ah, if he could but tell. Mystic form of the Future, wilt thou reveal it to me? And it is with like uncertainty that we front now the new year. We have most of us lived long enough—we most of us know enough of life to discern, as we lift our eyes, a man with a drawn sword in his hand. That there will be more or less of disagreeable and trying encounter, is sure. We shall have difficulties to grapple with, in the sweat of our face. Temptations will assail us; vexations and annoyances will have to be borne. But will it be, upon the whole, one of our happy and prosperous years? Shall we get through it, however threatened or assaulted, unrifled and unharmed, without being sore wounded or overthrown in the way. The character of past years has varied. Some, notwithstanding many little rufflings and unpleasantnesses experienced in them, we have looked back upon with satisfaction and thankfulness, and have called them good years. Ah, we did well in them. They were marked by much sunshine. Our enterprises prospered; our friendships yielded only sweetness. Other years, perhaps, we were glad to have done with. They are remembered as black years, in which the sun shone only at rare intervals, and for a brief space, between ever-returning clouds. The years have varied with us. In some, if we have had to fight, we have conquered. In others, the tide of battle has rolled against us, leaving us broken and mauled. "New year coming on apace, what hast thou to give me? Comest thou promising peace and brightness, or big with thunder and gloom?" We ask in vain, as Joshua did when he cried, "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?" For observe, that question of his was not replied to. "Nay," said the armed angel, "I am no token, no prophecy of that, one way or the other." But what does he say to the wistfully inquiring man? "As the captain of the host of the Lord I am now come." Here, then, was what Joshua saw, presently, in looking forward to the future. Not what was going to happen—not the victory or the defeat to which he was destined in marching against the Canaanites; but, that it would not be himself alone at the head of the Hebrew army; that One would be there, superintending and disposing, ordering and commanding, whom the people beheld not, even the very same angel of Jehovah's presence. He saw himself divinely overlooked and attended; planning, manœuvring, fighting to the best of his ability, as the chosen general, under the constant eye and control of an unseen Generalissimo, who had His purposes, whose purposes were good and right, and would be always fulfilling themselves in and through all. It was thus that the Future answered his appeal, "What hast thou hidden for us in thy thick darkness?" It answered, "God is here—caring, managing, ruling to the end; the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob." An inspiring vision, to have been borne in upon him as he stood alone in the plain, with the grim fortifications of Jericho frowning down on him, and thought of the work to be done, with its difficulties and dangers. Better, surely, than any glimpse or foreshadowing of coming events would have been. And if we be able to receive it, what can be more inspiring for us in our entrance upon the unknown land of a new year than the vision, not merely of an existence in the universe over and above all phenomena, and producing and sustaining them; but of a living Being, transcendent in wisdom and goodness, whose purpose is our education and the education of the world, and who is working evermore, in whatever happens, in whatever chances and changes may befall, to forward it; of One who is not only with us in our doings and sufferings, our aspirations and struggles, our mistakes and stumblings, but in

them with continuous tuitional intent; under whom we are pursuing our ends, by whom, in all paths, we are led, in whose kingdom we are from morn to eve, let it be with us as it may. Many earnest souls around us are starting afresh to-day, as they have come through the year that is gone, with no such vision. Joshua's angel does not manifest itself to them. Lifting their eyes, they behold nothing but the walls of Jericho and the encampment of Israel, and over all, an empty sky. Nor are they the less ready for the battle, or the less patient and strong, hopeful and brave, in essaying to conquer. And we may be sure too, that guidance and help from above, is theirs; for the presence and energy of the Captain of the Lord's host does not depend upon men's seeing Him. He is not absent or inoperative because they are unable to discern Him. Nevertheless, happy are they to whom He is visible. Let us be thankful then, if to-day, as we are girding our loins anew for the work of life, and for whatever life may bring—let us be thankful if we can behold with Joshua the angel of Jehovah's presence, and, in setting out, pause a little to entertain and foster the strengthening vision. "But what saith my Lord to His servant?" cried the son of Nun when he felt the august Presence about him, and bowed himself to the ground before it. "What saith my Lord to His servant? Ah! now that I have Thee here; now that Thou art revealed to me in the way, speak to me; tell me something. Surely, I shall hear some great thing from Thy lips—surely, some great secret will be whispered to me. With the Invisible Power thus consciously nigh me, I may expect wondrous words, important disclosures." We can understand and sympathise with the expectation, can we not? What might not God Almighty tell, we are apt to think, if He were once found speaking. So thought Joshua, waiting in awed anticipation with his face to the earth. And from the mystic Presence overshadowing him, what syllables fell? What was it that he heard to whom it grew vocal? "Loose thy shoe from off thy foot, for the place whereon thou standest is holy." Was that all? That was all. No declaring of things that had been kept hidden, no weighty revealings. Only a plain and familiar admonition, to cherish and preserve within him a right temper of mind, a right spirit—to see to it that he walked reverently, and cultivated purity, as one who dwelt in a temple. That was all the heavens told him, when they leaned toward him with a word. "Take heed to yourself, to your character and conduct; be dutiful, be loyal to the vision that is yours. Recognise and answer the claim on you to be holy." And should we be disappointed, were the silent sky, in sending on a sound, to drop upon our ear no more than such an admonition as Joshua heard? What, however, do we need so much, for all present and future benediction, as to be taught a truer, finer ordering of ourselves? and what better, richer, more brightly fruitful new year's gift could we have from above than a deepened sense of duty and a fresh impulse toward reverent and noble living? Yes, oh yes, "Blessed are the lowly in spirit; theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the pure in heart; they shall see God." (*S. A. Tipple.*)

CHAPTER VI.

VERS. 1–5. **Now Jericho was straitly shut up.**—*Shut up:*—An old writer says that every carnal heart is a Jericho shut up; God sits down before it and displays mercy and judgment: it hardens itself in a wilful security and saith, "I shall never be moved." What numbers of men there are who close their hearts and keep them barred against God! God might have thrown down the walls of Jericho at once, but you must remember that He uses means to accomplish ends. God required Israel to walk round Jericho. That was their part. God is not usually in a hurry. He can afford to wait until the seventh day before bringing down the walls. I don't read that the Israelites grew tired of waiting on this occasion. They went at it day after day quietly marching ahead. Here is a lesson of perseverance for us. We sometimes grow impatient. We see no good resulting from our own labours, and are disposed to murmur. (*Charles Leach.*) **Seven trumpets of rams' horns.**—*The blast of the trumpet* was, in the Jewish feasts, the solemn proclamation of the presence of God. And hence the purpose of that singular march circumambulating the city was to declare "Here is the Lord of the whole earth, weaving His invisible cordon and network around the doomed city." 1. Here is a confidence in the Divine

presence, manifested by unquestioning obedience to a Divine command. Joshua had spoken; God had spoken through him. And so here goes; up with the ark and the trumpets, and out on to the hot sand for the march. It would have been a great deal easier to have stopped in the tents. It was disheartening work marching round thus. The sceptical spirit in the host—the folk of whom there are many great-grandchildren living to-day, who always have objections to urge when disagreeable duties are crammed up against their faces—would have enough to say on that occasion, but the bulk of the people were true, and obeyed. Now, we do not need to put out the eyes of our understanding in order to practise the obedience of faith. And we have to exercise common sense about the things that seem to us to be duties. But this is plain, that if once we see a thing to be, in Christian language, the will of our Father in heaven, then that is everything, and there is only one course for us, and that is, unquestioning submission, active submission, and, what is as hard, passive submission. 2. Then here again is faith manifesting itself by an obedience which was altogether ignorant of what was coming. We, too, have to do our day's march, knowing very little about to-morrow; and we have to carry on all through life "doing the duty that lies nearest us," entirely ignorant of the strange issues to which it may conduct. So, seeing that we know nothing about the issues, let us make sure of the motives; and seeing that we do not know what to-morrow may bring forth, nor even what the next moment may bring, let us see that we fill the present instant as full as it will hold with active obedience to God, based upon simple faith in Him. 3. Then, here, again, is faith manifesting itself by persistency. A week was not long, but it was a long while during which to do that one apparently useless thing and nothing else. Familiarity would breed monotony, but notwithstanding the deadly influences of habit, the obedient host turned out for their daily round. "Let us not be weary in well-doing." (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Religious work often seems impracticable:*—When we are in great religious moods, in sublime spiritual ecstasies, in immediate and vital touch with God, we are not afraid to adopt apparently impracticable measures in carrying out the purposes of righteousness and wisdom. What could be more ridiculous, from a purely military point of view, than the directions given for the capture and overthrow of Jericho? They had no relation to the event. The foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men. We cannot always judge things by appearances. We ourselves are often startled by the want—apparent, at least—of adaptation of means to ends. The religious method may always be called impracticable. It is very slow; it does not seem to work with any immediate effect. What can be duller, slower, than what is generally understood as teaching? Yet it is by teaching that the kingdom of heaven is to be prepared for. It is a very slow method. One gleam from heaven's own midday would startle the world more surely! Why not this sudden outburst of intolerable glory? Because there is no lasting in it, no power of duration and sustenance. Men cannot live upon such visions. Things that are not are employed to bring to nought things that are. Foolish things, little things, contemptible things, are used by the hand almighty to shake down towers and walls and temples and capitals, and bring them to nought before the throne of righteousness. Thus religion is not afraid of the impracticable—at least, of what may appear to be impracticable to those who look only upon the surface. Religion has never been afraid to claim prayer as one of its very pillars—the signature of its very power. What can, from the outside, be more futile and ridiculous than to be speaking into the vacant air—to exclude all living things upon the earth, and to speak to One we have never seen, and pour our heart's penitence, woe, hope, into an ear we cannot detect amid all the clouds which float through the heavens? Yet religion says, "Continue instant in prayer"; you have no other hope. Besides, processes may be long, and results may be brought about in startling suddenness. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) **The seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times.**—*The compassing of Jericho:*—1. The posture was a walking posture, as it had no direct or probable tendency for subduing the city, so it likewise seemed ridiculous to the rude citizens, who might well scoffingly say, "What are these foolish people doing? Have they not had a walk long enough for forty years in the wilderness that now they have a new walk round about our walls, and that once every day for six days together? They desire indeed to possess our city, but they may compass it long enough before that posture can conquer it," &c. Besides, this posture seemed perilous as well as ridiculous. Yet God will make Jericho as well as His Israel know that He can give victory to their feet as well as to their hands. God oftentimes delighteth to go some way of His own (which is not man's way)

and worketh His own will by such means, and in such a manner, as the world judges both perilous and ridiculous. As the greater was God's glory in effecting this great work, wherein Israel contributed nothing to it, so the stronger was Israel's faith in believing it should be effected, notwithstanding both the difficulty, danger, and improbability of means and manner. (1) The term of place or space of ground they walked was, negatively, not an acre, or furlong, or any such measures of miles, nor was it a half-turn, but positively, it must be a whole turn, a compassing the city round about. Had they not gone round about, all had not been their own. They had conquered no more than they had compassed, so had done their work but to half part. It looks more like children's play, in treading a maze, than any stratagem of warriors. All this was to teach Israel not to expect success from their own prowess or policy, but merely from the prescription and favourable presence of that God who can work what He pleaseth, even by the most contemptible ways. (2) The term of time unto which this action was extended, this compassing the city, must be done once every day for six days together, but on the seventh day they must surround it seven times successively (vers. 3, 11, 13–16). Israel walks their circuit six times over for six days, and on each day return into their camp. Nothing was effected in order to Jericho's overthrow, so long a time they are held in suspense, for the exercise of their faith and patience. (*C. Ness.*)

Work which seems aimless:—God taught His people to work six days, apparently doing nothing. It is easy enough to work for Christ when ground is manifestly being gained. Fighting is not hard work when souls are won to Christ; when an enemy goes down at well-nigh every blow, and many captives are delivered. It is far harder work to toil and do nothing. Thus Carey laboured for a lifetime marching round letters and languages and dialects, and probably some wondered how he could call that work for Christ. So David Livingstone spent his life in walking up and down Africa, and some well-meaning and good men asked, "How can he call himself a missionary? He is merely a geographer," they said; "he has been discovering the water-shed of a continent instead of carrying to its thirsty inhabitants the Water of Life." So little did they know of what was being done; so little, perhaps, did Livingstone himself sometimes know. We can see now that in all that, to some, aimless marching, England's sympathy, America's sympathy, the sympathy of all Christendom, was being won for Africa; and that the heart of the whole Church of Christ was being brought to feel, "Those negroes must no longer be made slaves; those men and women must hear the gospel; the work of the great man who died upon his knees for Africa, and whose heart lies buried in Africa, must not be suffered—under God, shall not be suffered—to fall to the ground." It is very hard, however, to learn to do what seems to be nothing. It is hard for parents to teach their children, when all their labour seems so useless; fruitless work is hard for other teachers, and hard for preachers. God shows us here that it is enough for us to say, "Am I doing faithfully and prayerfully and zealously what my Lord has bidden me to do?" *A justifiable Sabbath work:*—Was it not contrary to the spirit of the law to make no difference on the Sabbath? As the narrative reads we are led to think that the Sabbath was the last of the seven days, in which case, instead of a cessation of labour, there was an increase of it sevenfold. Possibly this may be a mistake; but at the least it seems as if, all days being treated alike, there was a neglect of the precept, "In it thou shalt not do any work." To this it has usually been replied that the law of the Sabbath being only a matter of arrangement, and not founded on any unchangeable obligation, it was quite competent for God to suspend it or for a time repeal it, if occasion required. The present instance has been viewed as one of those exceptional occasions when the obligation to do no work was suspended for a time. But this is hardly a satisfactory explanation. Was it likely that immediately after God had so solemnly charged Joshua respecting the book of the law, that it was "not to depart out of his mouth, but he was to meditate therein day and night, to observe to do according to all that was written therein," that almost on the first occurrence of a public national interest He would direct him to disregard the law of the Sabbath? What seems the just explanation is, that this solemn procession of the ark was really an act of worship, a very public and solemn act of worship, and that therefore the labour which it involved was altogether justifiable, just as the Sabbath labour involved in the offering of the daily sacrifices could not be objected to. It was a very solemn and open demonstration of honour to that great Being in whom Israel trusted—of obedience to His word, and unfaltering confidence that He would show Himself the God of His chosen people. At every step of their march they might

well have sung—"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help." The absurdity of their proceeding, to the eye of flesh, invested it with a high sanctity, because it testified to a conviction that the presence of that God who dwelt symbolically in the ark would more than compensate for all the feebleness and even apparent silliness of the plan. It was indeed an exception to the usual way of keeping the Sabbath, but an exception that maintained and exalted the honour of God. And, in a sense, it might be called resting, inasmuch as no aggressive operations of any kind were carried on; it was simply a waiting on God, waiting till He should arise out of His place, and cause it to be seen that (Psa. xliv. 3). (*W. G. Blaikie, D.D.*)

Vers. 6–11. **Ye shall not shout . . . until the day I bid you shout.**—*Joshua taking Jericho* :—I. ONE OF THE ESSENTIAL ATTRIBUTES OF A GREAT LEADER—THE POWER TO REPRESS THE PASSIONS OF A NATION OF WARRIORS: "Ye shall not shout," &c. This was the command of a young ruler. The temptation of the young and inexperienced is impatience. We but gradually learn the lesson, "He that believeth shall not make haste." Joshua, however, had learnt this. It is easy to arouse a nation when new scenes suggest new possibilities, but it is difficult to suppress emotions at such a time, and to insist upon silence "until." This is one of the tests of rulership. Every general should be equal to this task. Joshua was. II. ONE OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A GREAT PEOPLE—WILLING OBEDIENCE TO THE COMMAND TO REPRESS THEIR EMOTIONS AT SUCH A TIME AS THIS. Joshua does not seem to have told them all that the Lord had told him. Their ignorance of the final issue made obedience to the command to go round Jericho for six days without giving vent to their feelings in one single shout the more difficult, and on that account imparted to it a grander meaning. At the outset the nation of conquerors had to conquer their own spirit. There must be a reserve of force. Only those who can be silent can shout to good purpose. So has it ever been with God's servants. They have had their seasons of delay. Moses in Midian; Christ's disciples tarrying in Jerusalem "until," &c.; Paul in Arabia; so here the people who could persist in their apparently meaningless rounds "until" they were bidden to shout, had the making of conquerors in them. The shout would have all the momentum of the delay in it. III. THE DIVINE METHOD OF ACCOMPLISHING TRIUMPHS: "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit." The triumph thus gained is often the consummation of patient waiting and implicit obedience on our part. The world misunderstands the meaning of the apparent monotonous routine of Providence, and asks sneeringly, "Where is the promise of His coming?" All the while we know that the Lord is not slack concerning His promise, and that every apparent delay hastens the final consummation. And "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." (*D. Davies.*)

Vers. 12–27. **The wall fell down flat.**—*The fight of faith* :—Of uninspired poems, perhaps the most widely read are those which celebrate a siege—the siege of Troy. Homer and Virgil have sung in noble numbers the praises of the heroes in that world-renowned fight. Their qualities, deeds, reverses, successes, as thus recorded, will live as long as such poetry has a charm for the human mind. But, after all, the principles which animated Agamemnon, Ajax, Achilles, Nestor, Ulysses, and others of these old-world heroes, were very commonplace. The play of human passion, headstrong, self-willed, fierce, implacable, impure, treacherous, constitutes the base, shaft, and capital of these poetic columns. The whole thing is of the earth earthy. It is the fight of the flesh that we witness, not the fight of faith. In this chapter we have the record of a siege of another sort, the description of heroes of a different spirit. There an innocent city must be besieged for ten years because Paris ran off with a beautiful woman. Here, after a seven days' pause for possible penitence, the Lord's host executed judgment on a city of exceptional wickedness because God's patience was exhausted. There in long works elaborated by the genius of the world's great poets we have many pictures that command our admiration. Here in one little line the Holy Ghost presents a picture far more marvellous and sublime, when He simply says, "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down." I. Consider, then, this fight of faith; and first of all mark THE FOUNDATION OF THE FAITH whereby Jericho was overthrown. It was a well-founded faith, for it rested altogether on the Word of God. "What are the marching orders?" This is the only question faith asks; if it is convinced in regard to this, it can command mountains to be plucked up by the roots and cast into the sea. As it was in the

siege of Jericho so is it in the siege of Mansoul. All must be done in faith, or nothing is done to good purpose. Faith asks, What has God commanded? And the answer is clear as day: "Preach the Word." "Testify of Me." We have something more to do than to defend the faith, or to apologise for the gospel; we have to prophesy over the dry bones, knowing that in the power of that Word they will rise up an exceeding great army. II. Think also of THE TRIAL OF HIS FAITH. The whole thing looked like child's play. The means seem to human wisdom utterly, ridiculously inadequate to the end in view. Even so in our days faith is tried. What, it may be asked, are you to preach, preach for ever, to do nothing but preach? Again, it must have been a trial to Israel to wait so long. If going round Jericho is to accomplish the work, surely once round is as good as a thousand times. If one shout will lay the walls flat, why not shout the first day, and make short work of it? To try every mode of presenting the gospel, so as to reach the conscience and influence the life of those who hear, but never to see any good result therefrom; to labour in some degraded district to elevate the masses by the leverage of the gospel, and to see them sink back like dry sand into their congenial degradation; to teach in the Sabbath-school with earnestness and diligence, and never have the assurance that one soul is savingly touched; to train up the children in the family with careful pains and earnest prayers, and yet to find their hearts wayward and prone to evil—all these are sad and trying experiences under which the heart is apt to sink discouraged and to ask, Is this gospel the true power after all? For a cure to such faintness let us remember Israel. Perfect victory comes soon or late to every soul who works in the energy of God's Spirit as God directs. Not only the walls of Jericho but mighty mountains are beaten small by the worm Jacob. Still another part of the trial of Israel's faith must have been the thought of what their enemies had been saying and thinking. Say what we will, the opinions and thoughts of our fellows have an influence over us, and cause either gratification or discomfort. One of the severest trials to the faithful witness of Christ is his critics. Some of them are unfriendly, and their aim is to destroy his influence. Some of them are friendly; and their purpose is to extend his influence. If he is a foolish man, weak in faith, he will be spoiled by either of them. He should try to get all the good out of them that is in them; and if there is no good in them pay no more attention to them than the Israelites did to the men of Jericho. III. As we look at Israel in its march round Jericho we also see a good example of THE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH. We have need to imitate these warriors, and to remember that faith without works is dead. Faith develops itself in and by docility. We can attain to victory, the Divine blessing can rest on our labours, only as we work according to the Divine plans, only as we obey His revealed will. IV. We have still further in the conduct of Israel before Jericho a display of THE COURAGE OF FAITH. Faith is brave as well as obedient. Displaying its banners in the name of the Lord, it can run through a troop, and overleap a wall. Faith never underrates difficulties; faith never despises danger; but obeying God, it never quails before them, even when it is most exposed. Walking in the path of obedience, it knows that the Lord will preserve it from all evil, and therefore its heart never fails. V. THE PATIENCE OF ISRAEL'S FAITH is also plainly shown. The faith of these warriors was enduring as well as courageous. This was like the finishing of their education so far as patience went. Much mischief is often wrought by that natural impetuosity which rushes forward before God has prepared the way, even as much ground is often lost by that lack of patience which faints in the day of adversity, and gives in before the work is done. Only by patient continuance in well-doing are great things accomplished. VI. Though the faith of Israel was strongly tried before Jericho, still it was not without true ENCOURAGEMENT. Faith can always derive strength from some quarter: it can live where all else would die. The command of God would encourage Israel. No word that He speaks is vain. Also the very way in which they marched would strengthen their hearts. They marched as God's people, with Jehovah's priests in their company, bearing the sacred ark of God's strength, before which all the might of man is weakness. The sacred number seven, moreover, interwoven with their work, showed that there was order and completeness in the task set before them, even though they might not be able to discover them. VII. Think, lastly, of THE TRIUMPH OF THIS FAITH. Nothing in Jericho was left alive. Thus perished the enemies of Jehovah. Israel's victory was complete. Behold in Jericho two things—the might of man, as revealed in these walls and towers and stalwart soldiers; the wisdom of man, as shown in their watchfulness, their care and precautions.

Behold also two other things—the foolishness of God in that aimless marching round the city; the weakness of God in the sound of these rams' horns, in the shout of these soldiers. See the effect; the walls are a ruin, Jericho is burned with fire, the place is desolate. Learn therefore that the weakness of God is stronger than men, and the foolishness of God is wiser than men. (*A. B. Mackay.*)

The walls of Jericho:—In various directions we may find a counterpart of these remarkable experiences. I. In Christian experience. If Egypt represents our conflict with the world, and Amalek our conflict with the flesh, the seven nations of Canaan represent our conflict with the principalities and powers of wicked spirits, who resist our entrance into the heavenlies, and our practical realisation of what Christ has wrought for us. Who is there amongst us that does not know, or has not known, of something—a cherished indulgence, a friendship, a pernicious entanglement—reared as an impassable barrier to the enjoyment of those blessed possibilities of Christian experience which are ours in Christ, but which for that reason seem beyond our reach? That thing is a Jericho. Now it cannot be the purpose of God that anything, however deeply rooted, should shut His redeemed ones out of the heavenly places, which are theirs in Christ—even though it should be the result of their own sin, or mistake, the heirloom of early indiscretions, the entail of trespass off the narrow path. 1. Be still. The hardest of all commandments this. That our voice should not be heard! That we should utter our complaints to God alone! All this is foreign to our habits and taste. As death is the last enemy to be destroyed in the universe of God, so is the restraint of the tongue the last lesson learnt by His children. "Be still," saith God, "and know that I am God. I will be exalted," &c. And that soul may well be still and wait which has learnt that the Lord of hosts is beside it, and the God of Jacob is its refuge. To that Friend it hies to pour out its secret agony. In that home it nestles as in the covert of a great rock, sheltered from the blast. 2. Obey. As in this story so in grace, there must be co-operation between God and man. Only God can remove the difficulties that stand in the way of an entirely consecrated and blessed life, but there are commands and duties which it is incumbent on us to fulfil. In some cases we are withholding obedience that we should give at once. There are things which we ought to do which we are not doing. And there is equal danger in doing more than we should—endeavouring to scale walls which we are told to encompass; shooting before the word of command has been uttered; making the circuit of the city oftener than the once each day prescribed by the Divine ordering. It is so hard to feel that we do more by doing less; that we save time by resting quietly in our tents; that it is vain to rise early and late take rest, because He giveth to His beloved while they sleep. 3. Have faith. Look away from all your preparations, and even from your God-commanded acts, to God Himself; and as you do so your difficulties will melt away, that stone will be rolled from the mouth of the sepulchre, that iron gate will open of its own accord, those mighty walls will fall down flat. And it shall come to pass that the obstacle which threatened to make the best life impossible shall minister to such an unfolding of God's very present help as shall furnish fuel for praise in all coming years. II. In Christian work. The apostle speaks of strongholds that had to be cast down, and of high things that exalted themselves against the knowledge of God; and asserts that he did not war against such things according to the flesh, and that the weapons of his warfare were not of the flesh, but mighty before God for the casting down of strongholds, and for the bringing of every high and proud thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. Our only hope is to act on strictly spiritual lines, because we wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with the wicked spirits that lie behind all that is seen in this world of men and things. If we can overthrow the dark spirits that abet and maintain, we shall see the system which they support crumble as a palace of clouds before the wind. Let us be pure and holy, giving time to heart-searching in the presence of the Captain; let us lift up the sacrifice and work of Jesus; let us blow the gospel trumpet of alarm and summons to surrender; let us be much in silent prayer before God; let us cherish a spirit of unity and love, as the tribes of Israel forgot their differences in one common expedition against their foes; above all, let us believe in the presence and co-operation of God, and we shall see the old miracle repeated, and the walls of Jericho fall down flat. III. In the story of the Church. This capture of Jericho is surely capable of being read as a parable of things that are yet to be. We know that the world lieth in the power of the wicked one. It has long boasted itself against God, with its mighty walls and gates, and it would seem as if the time will never come of which psalmists and kings have sung and spoken

in rapturous phrase. In the meanwhile the various tribes of the Church of Christ have been perambulating about the walls, subjected to much derision and mockery, though sometimes a sickening premonition of approaching judgment must steal upon the hearts of the votaries of worldliness. For nearly nineteen centuries the circuit has been made, the trumpet-blast uttered, the testimony maintained. And surely the seven days have nearly expired. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *The lofty city, He layeth it low:*—This incident teaches solemn truths as to God's character and working, and animating thoughts as to our duty as His soldiers. The true revelation of God is by His deeds, and the Scripture words of prophet or psalmist, which we call revelation, are all based upon and draw out the significance of the history. The page of which this siege is the first paragraph is written in blood, and is crowded with terrible entries; but it is a page in the revelation of God, and its message, once delivered, is not set aside, though completed, by the later pages, which tell of love as His very being. If God makes Himself known by His doings as men do, the dream of a God whose love is so flaccid that He cannot punish is baseless. But this same story reveals His long-suffering patience as well; for, not only had generations passed, during which His thunder was silent, but even at this supreme moment the cloud gathered slowly, and ample time was given to escape. The slow minute-hand creeps round the dial for a long silent hour; but when it reaches the sixtieth of the seconds, in each of which it might have been stopped, the bell rings out, and all is over. God waits, that men may turn; but if they do not turn God strikes, and the stroke is mortal. Now, all this is as true under the gospel as it was in the days of Joshua. The message of love does not contradict the message of law, nor the revelation of the Father set aside the revelation of the Judge. The lessons of stimulus for us are equally plain. The Epistle to the Hebrews points to the fall of Jericho as a triumph of faith, and emphasises the obedience to the strange command to compass the walls, and the patience which did it seven days, as the tokens of the Israelites' faith. So we may draw the lessons of the conquering power of faith over all strongest opposition, of the way by which faith becomes victorious, and of the tokens which will attest its presence. Jericho is a symbol of the evils against which the individual Christian has in his own life to fight, but still more of the banded and organised enemies arrayed against the Church. The great Babylon shines through the little Jericho, and its fall comes about in the same fashion. The faith which these fierce sons of the desert exercised was in form rude enough; but, however little of a spiritual or refining aspect it had, it was still real confidence in God's help, and that, in its poorest form, makes the weakest strong, and turns cowards into heroes. In its lowest operations, it will send men to dash themselves against stone walls with desperate bravery, and to meet death as joyfully as a bride. Christians, who should have it in its highest and purest energy, ought not to be less brave in the harder conflict which is laid upon them—against evil in their own hearts and the organised iniquities of society. The one victorious power is that of absolute confidence in God's help. Eloquence, learning, strategy, organising power, machinery, and wise methods, are all very good; but an ounce of faith is worth a ton of them when the question is how the walls of Jericho are to be got down. It will beget these qualities, they will never produce it. Mark how faith conquers. It does so by bringing the might of God into the field. Faith is not the battering-ram which beats down the walls, but only the hand which swings the ram. God's power is, if we may say so, set loose to work through our faith; and that faith is mighty, because it opens the door for the entrance of His omnipotence. The slow marches round and round the doomed city, and the war-cry, at last did not effect the capture; but they were the tokens of the faith which brought into play the power which did. We may learn, too, the tokens of faith. They are docile obedience and perseverance therein. It is a slow task to leaven society with the principles of the gospel, which will destroy deeply rooted and long-continued abuses. But we have to "keep pegging away," to use Abraham Lincoln's homespun heroic phrase. If we can do no more, we can at least blow the trumpet which proclaims that God is here and summons Jericho to surrender. If we have to die before the seventh day comes, no matter. We shall have our share in the triumph all the same, and, wherever we are, shall hear the great shout which tells the fall of the bloody city, "to be found no more at all." (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Jericho captured:*—I. GOD WOULD HAVE HIS PEOPLE WORK. We daily insist upon it that works do not make a man to live, but we equally insist upon it that spiritual life continually manifests itself by holy deeds. The soldiers of God's army, after they had crossed the

Jordan, were not to lie still in luxurious ease till Jericho's walls should crumble down by slow degrees; and though God determined to send Jericho to destruction on a sudden, yet His people are not to sit still upon some neighbouring knoll and expect the catastrophe: they are to labour, and Jericho is to fall as the result of their toil. Let us look at this work a little in connection with this narrative. 1. You will observe that the work to be done by Israel was universal. There was a place for each one to occupy. The men of arms were to go round the city, and with them the priests were to march also. Both the ecclesiastical and the military castes should be represented here. They must neither of them sit still. God would have His people work universally. 2. But, next, He would have them work in His own appointed way. They are not to go in a scramble—in a boyish race; there must be the soldiers in their troops, the priests in their array, and then again, the men of war to bring up the rear. God would have His people work according to His own revealed will. If I go upon a tour I do not expect to see certain sights which have been guaranteed to me by my friend, unless I agree to follow the little chart which he has mapped out for me. I cannot expect to have that sublime view of the Alps if I refuse to climb a certain spot and stand there and view the glacier and the snow peak glittering in the sun. And I cannot expect to have God's blessing in my ministry and in the Sunday-school class unless I keep to "It is written," and in all things have a tender conscience, and am jealous of myself lest I err. 3. Then, again, remember, they encompassed the city daily. So does God call His Church to work daily. The wheel must revolve again, and again, and again: it is that perpetual motion of industry which produces wealth, and it must be the ceaseless energy of our zeal which shall produce spiritual conquest. 4. Nor have we exhausted the metaphors with which our text supplies us, for surely we may add that God would have His people work in faith. We are told that, "by faith the walls of Jericho fell down." Is the preaching of the gospel a power? If you think it is not, never try it again. Is the gospel mighty to save? Will the gospel come out victorious? If you have any doubt slink back to your cowardly repose, but let the man whom God sends never doubt. If you have achieved no successes, if after fifty years your trumpet of jubilee was exceeding small, if after fifty years it was something like a ram's horn that had not been bored, and could not make any noise at all, yet still go on; your time for shouting has not come yet, but your time for compassing the city is always present. Go on with it, go on with it, and God will not permit you to end till you have won the victory. So let us notice once more under this head of work, they worked with patience and courage, God kept this people labouring in the presence of difficulty. Sometimes we get into the habit of shutting our eyes to difficulty; that will not do: faith is not a fool, faith does not shut her eyes to difficulty, and then run head foremost against a brick wall—never. Faith sees the difficulty, surveys it all, and then she says, "By my God will I leap over a wall"; and over the wall she goes. II. GOD WOULD HAVE HIS PEOPLE WAIT. The delay must have sorely tried the faith and patience of the Israelites. There are a great many brethren who seem to be perfectly satisfied to rest at ease, but men of war do not generally seem to be of that temperament. When I was in the military prison at Dublin I observed a form of punishment there. Men were carrying large shot. A man took up a large shot and carried it to the end of the yard, and he afterwards had to pick that shot up and bring it back again. I said, "How is it you do not let them take all the shot to that end and pile them up there?" The officer said, "We used to do so but it was no use, for when the fellows had piled them up they felt they were doing something, but now we make them carry the shot from one end of the yard to the other, and then back again, and back again, and they feel they have to work hard and do nothing. That is always miserable work to the soldiers." Many of our soldiers at Sebastopol made bitter complaints at not being led to battle. And you will often have heard young military men say, that they hate the inactivity of peace, they want to be doing something. Now these men of war were kept for six days marching round and round the city, and they must have felt themselves to have been doing very little all that week. Though as men of war we would rather come to close quarters and see more done, yet as men of God we must keep to our posts of duty, and learn how to wait. Besides this, what rendered the waiting so very galling was (what must have struck their reason if it did not assail their faith) the utter desperateness of the case. How could they hope to win that city by simply going round and round? "Give me a good ladder," says one, "a rope-ladder and a couple of good irons at the end of it; just let me hear the clank upon

the top-stone, and I am your man to lead the 'forlorn hope,' and there are fifty thousand of us to follow, and we will soon have Judah's standard waving on the top, and make the sons of Jericho know what the sons of Abraham can do." But no; they must just march round the place till they have compassed the city twelve times. And so there are certain spirits apt to say, "Could not we do more by adopting these methods and such other expedients?" Now we know that God has His reasons for making us wait. It is for His own glory we doubt not. We know that all things work together for good, and, we believe, it will be ultimately for our profit. When I have read some masterly tragic poem, and verse after verse has dwelt upon the horrible portion of the tale, did I wish it shortened? Would I have the author leave out one of those dark verses? Not I. God is writing a great poem of human history, the subject is the victory of truth, the destruction of Antichrist. Let the history be long. Who wants it shortened? who wants a brief story on so exceedingly interesting a subject as this, from so great an Author? III. GOD WOULD HAVE HIS PEOPLE WIN. The victory is very sure, and, when it comes forth, very complete. Nothing could be more so. It may be very sudden also, and it will be very glorious. But we shall get nothing by it, for when Jericho fell, nobody gained anything except to offer it unto the Lord; so that we have to persevere in disinterested service, just toiling on for the Master, remembering that when success comes it will all be His—every single atom of it—the glory will be to Him and not to us. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Lessons from the fall of Jericho*:—I. THE LESSON OF SELF-CONTROL. "Ye shall not shout" was perhaps a hard order to the enthusiastic young soldiers of Joshua. Yet by putting the seal on their lips and withholding arrow and missle they became victors. How grandly do the annals of biography illustrate this duty of controlling one's spirit! Under the clouds of aspersion, maligning of motive, slanders, and jeers that darken the sun of truth, a good man is often called to fight in the shade, to walk wearily and monotonously the round of duty in silence and in patience. He who endures the contradictions against himself is like the disciplined soldier who stands in the ranks, seeing the cowardly ruffian approach, pistol in hand; he receives death calmly rather than break ranks, fire without orders, or disobey commands. There are trying positions in life when we must wait silently till we see the whites of the enemy's eyes, or hold the linstock from the touch-hole even while the hostile broadsides crash through our ship's timbers. This hard and severe discipline makes noble characters and turns the common man into a hero. It infuses in the soul the right kind of fear—fear for the noblest, fear lest we fail in obedience to what ought to be obeyed. II. THE LESSON OF PERSEVERANCE. Jericho, the walled and apparently impregnable fortress, is but a symbol of foes in the heart and evils in the world. The conflict is lifelong. God calls us to what seems slow, tedious, patient methods. Sometimes He seems to shock all worldly sense and maxims by His providences, which make even His children, for a time, a by-word, a shaking of the head and wagging of the tongue to the ungodly. The intrenched evil spirits laugh. Sometimes there is a kind of enemy that cometh not forth but by prayer and by fasting. Abstinence and silence are laid upon us. Behold the Jericho in us—habitual faults, hereditary vices, bosom sins. Behold in the Christian's warfare—opposition of science, falsely so called, in philosophy, in criticism, in infidelity, in war, in intemperance, in vice, these are Jerichos that appear impregnable. The difficulties seem walled up to heaven. Nevertheless, we are well able, with God's help, to possess the land and to take every city. III. THE POWER OF FAITH AND ITS GAIN BY EXERCISE. This tax on Israel's courage—compelling men of war, whose yell in charging is part of their offensive power, to make silence a weapon—was laid on them for the strengthening of their faith. The whole affair appeared irrational. But to those loyally obedient to the command of a leader inspired of God, their act was in the finest strain of reason. The method selected, the means employed, were those of the wisest and bravest; for Joshua, their leader, was a tried man. Nor, without neglecting means, are we to think that the same means employed by others, even mighty men of old, will serve us without faith. (*W. E. Griffis.*) *The fall of Jericho*:—I. THE SITUATION OF THE ISRAELITES AT THIS TIME. The wilderness is behind them. They are standing on this side Jordan within the borders of the long wished for Canaan. But though in Canaan, the land is not yet theirs. A powerful nation is in possession of it, from whom they have still to take it if they would occupy it. And how are they to take it? They are without military resources of any kind. And have we not shadowed forth here the condition of many of God's servants in our world? your own spiritual condition perhaps at this moment? As you look

backward you can see that much indeed has been done for you. But now what is your situation? You are ready to say, "Almost as bad as it was at first. We thought we were saved for ever, but we see now that our salvation is but begun. Not only is heaven itself far off, but all that is heavenly and spiritual: it is yet to be won. And how is it to be won? We know not. We have as many difficulties before us as we have escaped, or more: and we are helpless as children." II. THE TOWN THESE ISRAELITES HAVE NOW TO TAKE. 1. It is a strong place. Oh, what a picture of Jericho within your hearts! Men of the world look on their souls as what we may call an open country. Talk to them of the holiness of the gospel and the happiness of the gospel, they never feel that there is anything within them which shuts these things out of them. But what do some of you think? or rather what do you know? If you are taught of God you will answer, "We know this—our whole soul is entrenched against Christ and His salvation. It is covered all over with fortresses which shut Him out." 2. It was a frontier town also. God gave them, you observe, a most formidable difficulty to overcome the instant they set foot in Canaan. And so it is in the spiritual life. Severe conflicts, we say, are for the aged Christian; heavy trials for the man who has first borne light ones: the Lord deals gently with those who are inexperienced in His ways. And this is quite true. But yet it frequently happens that the servant of God has some one great difficulty to get over in the very outset of his course. III. THE MEANS BY WHICH THESE ISRAELITES TOOK THIS STRONG CITY. 1. They were means which God had appointed. We no more know how to master Satan or our own evil hearts than we know how to control the sea or direct the clouds. The Lord therefore gives us instruction in all things. Our real wisdom is to be mindful of our ignorance. 2. These means seemed most unlikely to succeed. So, too, in the spiritual warfare. If we would have the strongholds of Satan pulled down in our hearts we must expect God to give us many strange commands, and deal with us often in a very strange manner. When we look to Him for strength He may answer us by making us feel our weakness; and when we are determined to be zealous and active, and take our enemies by storm, He may say, "Your strength is to sit still. In returning and rest shall ye be saved." IV. THE PROBABLE REASONS WHY GOD APPOINTED THESE STRANGE MEANS TO OVERTHROW THIS CITY. 1. A simplicity of obedience was certainly one thing this event was intended to teach these Israelites. God's commands, be they what they may, must not be trifled with. We are not to sit in judgment on them; we must obey them. 2. A simplicity of faith was also inculcated here. God loves to be trusted as well as obeyed. He delights in the confidence of His people. 3. The people were taught, too, by this transaction the importance of a patient waiting on God. He consults our good, not only in the things He gives us, but in the day and hour in which He gives them. They are not always ready for us the moment we wish for them. We must generally wait for as well as seek them. 4. And one thing more Israel must surely have learnt here—to give glory to God. And now let me speak to three classes of persons. (1) To those who are in a situation like that of these Israelites while besieging Jericho—such as are warring with some powerful evil which keeps them from the enjoyment of some spiritual good. You want that sin vanquished, and so does God; but He wants more. He wants all sin vanquished in you, and you made meet for His heavenly kingdom. (2) Others, it may be, have just gained such a victory as this. You are even now rejoicing over some bosom-sin which the Lord has enabled you to overcome. Happy are you! Never build that vile Jericho again. Never suffer it to be built. Watch over its ruins lest they should unawares be raised up. And this also I would say to you—rejoice still in the ruins of those guilty walls. Look forward to other victories. If bought with a Saviour's blood, you are destined to be conquerors still, and "more than conquerors," triumphant conquerors, "through Him that loved you." (3) But there may be some to whom all this is a riddle. "Seek to enter in at the strait gate." (*C. Bradley, M.A.*) *Jericho taken*:—I. THE CITY WHICH WAS TO BE TAKEN. How vainly they reckon who leave God out of their calculations! When He is with us no opposing host can harm us; but when He is against us no earthly walls can protect us. II. THE MEANS BY WHICH IT WAS TAKEN. These were very peculiar. 1. There was no natural fitness in the means to produce the end designed. 2. The means employed were such as would provoke the ridicule of the besieged. 3. The means employed produced no effect whatever for six days, nor even on the seventh, until the shout was raised at the last. III. THE DISPOSITION THAT WAS TO BE MADE OF THE CITY. It was to be accursed or devoted to God. The Israelites in destroying

the inhabitants of Jericho and the Canaanites generally were but the instruments in God's hand of carrying out His sentence. Lessons: 1. Retribution, though long delayed, comes at last. God's judgments have leaden feet, and so they come slowly; but they have iron hands, and so they strike deadly when they come. 2. Faith does what God says, and asks no questions. 3. At the sound of the trumpets of the priests the walls of Jericho fell down. By the preaching of the gospel the strongholds of sin and Satan are to be overthrown. 4. Let us not be impatient of results when we are doing God's commands. 5. Success in our working for God is His doing, not ours, and so the whole glory of it should be given to Him. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *The siege of Jericho*:—Consider the circumstances of this event as calculated—I. To try the faith of Israel. II. To give a pledge that God would fight for His people. III. To secure all the glory to God. IV. To show that judgment would be sure to fall on the devoted Canaanites. (*C. D. Marston, M.A.*) *The overthrow of Jericho*:—Forty years before this God brought this people's fathers to this same point, and to this very opportunity, but faith in Him was at such a very low ebb that this deed could not be done. He got them comfortably packed away under the clod, and at last raised up out of their sons a more faithful generation to serve Him and to do His work. I can imagine that when the sough of that strange, mysterious band of people who had been creeping along the edge of the desert, so wonderfully guided, and so wonderfully fed, reached the people of Jericho, and when at last they themselves began to heave in sight, old men in Jericho would be saying to younger braves, "Be not afraid of them. These men's fathers came up against us, but when they saw the height of our walls, and the height of ourselves, their hearts melted within them like water, and we have seen nothing of them for almost a lifetime. Be not afraid of them." But they were wrong. I can imagine other men, who had been out doing the work of scouts and spies, saying as they gathered round their fires in Jericho and talked about the host that was on the way, "Ah, say not so. Whatever these men's fathers were, we have been out and seen the sons." The spies, no doubt, went back to Jericho and said, "Shut your gates! Man the walls! It is death or victory this time." There was something uncanny about the men and women who could so sing praise to an invisible God. And the advice was taken. Jericho was straitly shut up. They considered it no laughing matter this time. Only let God's truth, in power, come into the Church's heart, and this immediate triumph will be secured. Jericho will be straitly shut up. There will be a splendid division and separation, with a clear field and issue of conflict definitely presented—all Jericho there, and all Israel here, and the ground cleared in front for the contending hosts. But to-day, where are we? We do not know what is Jericho, and what is Israel. We are all here and there; all mixed, hopelessly, helplessly. But let us come near to God, as these Israelites after forty shameful years did. Let us gather round Him. Let us lift up our hearts in faith and prayer to Him. Then He will revive us, and this immediate sign will follow: the world will stop scoffing, the world will stop insulting. But then notice still further, that this was a victory won, by faith working through organisation. The cry on every hand is, "Organise, organise, organise!" I think that there is a little too much said about organisation. Still, we must not despise it, and we must not forget that God is not the God of confusion, but of order. God does His work by plan and system. I can imagine a small breed of Israelites—men far too like ourselves—who on the first day's round would have given vent to what we call "the rationalising spirit," and they would have said to their fellows, "Now, really, being Israelites has led us along some strange paths, but I will draw the line at this. As intelligent, sensible men, what mortal connection can there be between our walking round the walls with all this horn-blowing and tooting and the down-coming of these walls?" And do not the rationalists seem to have a deal to say for themselves? But when I put it that way, you see how stupid it would have been, judged by the after results. Always let us believe that faith in God is splendidly intelligent. And let me say, further, if any of us have doubts—and just because we are human we have them—let us adopt Joshua's plan. If you have doubts keep them to yourself. Do not give them to me. I have plenty of my own, and I will try and keep mine back from you. That is a grand plan for doubts. Shut the mouth upon them. Let them be hermetically sealed. Do not let them get the fresh air, and they will very likely wither and die. Less talking, and more walking. Less conferring with men, and more simple, sublime, stupendous faith in the Word of God. God has spoken, and God has sworn, "I will give Jericho into your hands, and its mighty men of valour.

Believe in Me." And it turned out that that was the highest wisdom. And, last of all, we see an organisation that was gloriously successful. On the seventh day they compassed the city seven times; and, as surely as God had spoken the word, the deed was done. He kept them from ventilating their doubts. He compelled them to look to Him, and to trust in Him. He poured contempt on all their wisdom and all their strength, so that their unbelief just withered away at the root, and died out in their hearts because it had nothing to feed upon. To-day, where are we? Just where the Israelites were; still, after all that has come and gone, only on the borders. The world still needs to be taken captive for Jesus Christ. The first thing is to get our own hearts, our own selves united—united round the Lord, and then knit together to each other as one man. You will always find in Scripture that, when God's people get united round about Him, nothing can stand before them. Here they were united, and Jericho fell without a stroke. (*John McNeill.*) *The fall of Jericho* (A Sermon to Children):—What do we mean when we pray for the Church "militant here on earth"? We mean the fighting Church—the Church on the battlefield of the world. Christians are God's army, and every one—men, women, and children—must try to show that they are good soldiers of Jesus Christ. What do you think is required of a good soldier? I. First of all he must be BRAVE. It has been said that an English soldier or sailor never knows when he is beaten. The word coward does not seem to go well with the name Briton. But there's a better sort of courage than that of a fighting soldier; that is, the courage of a Christian, which enables him to do right at any cost; which enables him to bear sorrow and insult and loss for Jesus Christ's sake. We all like to hear about acts of bravery like that of the boy ensign, Anstruther, who at the battle of Alma planted the colours of the 23rd Regiment on the wall of the great redoubt, and then fell, shot dead, with the colours drooping over him like a pall. But the courage which is thought most of in heaven is the courage to do right. The child who is brave enough to say "No" when he is asked to do wrong; the boy or girl who can't tell a lie to escape punishment; the schoolboy who is brave enough to say his prayers with a whole bedroom of companions laughing and jeering at him—these are the heroes whose names are written in God's Book. II. What else must a good soldier be? OBEDIENT. Can you remember any one mentioned in the Bible who was a very tall, powerful, brave soldier, and yet not a good soldier, because he was disobedient? King Saul. If you really love the Lord, you will keep His commandments. A soldier must not do what he likes, but what he is ordered to do. Between you and the Paradise of God there lies a long journey, the enemy's country, where the devil and his angels will fight against you; but don't be afraid, only be brave and go forward, and follow Jesus your Captain, and you will be able to say, as Paul said, "Thanks be unto God, who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ." (*British Weekly Pulpit.*) *The fall of Jericho*:—In the campaign against Jericho the children of Israel appear at their best. Never before or afterwards did they act with greater unanimity or singleness of heart. There were noble individual souls such as Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, Samuel, David, and the prophets, whom the writer of the book of the Hebrews could single out as worthy of mention; but there were only two events in which the nation as a whole participated which were specified in that splendid summary; namely, the crossing of the Red Sea as on dry land and the marching around Jericho seven days. Had Israel gone forward as they began, their course in history would have been like that of some mighty river, rising in the mountains and carrying a crystalline current far onward towards the sea, its waters unsullied by continuous flowing but sweet and clear to the very end. What makes the fall of Jericho for ever interesting is the fact that it resulted from the faith and obedience of the many. In this contest Joshua was hardly more conspicuous than the humblest soldier in his army. The striking thing about the campaign is the sharp contrast between the protracted preparation and the suddenness of the catastrophe. This is often the case. The end comes quickly and easily because of the long and careful preparation for it, the means being adjusted to the end. Only one thing then is needed, namely, to trust in God and go forward. That is what Israel did and kept on doing until the time came to shout. Then, because the people had done their part, God did His part. The faith they showed was simple and implicit. It did not confuse the two spheres of action, theirs and His. They did the walking and shouting, He overturned the walls. He was the effective agent, they the instrumental agent. (*S. E. Bushnell.*) *The Christian conflict*:—I. GOD CAN USE THE FEEBLEST INSTRUMENTALITIES TO ACCOMPLISH HIS PURPOSES. If ever

feeble instrumentalities were used, surely it was now. Feeble instrumentalities! God has often worked that way, and does so still. You remember proud Naaman! Many a time He has used the little girl, the little child, to bring men to acknowledge Him. What happened when the little child was born into your home? In the first place, it became the anchor which held the mother to her home as never before. But it did more than this. It was the connecting-link which bound together father and mother, husband and wife, in a closer bond of affection and oneness than the marriage ring. The ring was the beginning of the union, the coming of that little child was the completion of the union. Nay, it did more than this even. Impressed by the fact that the little one would look to you for guidance in matters of the soul and the better life, were you not forced to think how you had neglected such matters yourself, and for the child's sake, as well as your own, you were driven to the Cross to seek salvation? Such things have often happened, and we trust they may again. The Cross of Calvary was a feeble instrumentality. The preaching of a crucified and risen and glorified Saviour has often been regarded as a feeble thing. And yet, by the foolishness of preaching, God has won for Himself many thousands of the bravest and noblest champions of His cause. II. GOD WANTS ALL INSTRUMENTALITIES TO FIGHT AGAINST THE FORCES OF SIN. Look at ver. 9. It shows us that all the hosts of God were in that procession. God wants all, and the battle needs all. Armed strong men—men of courage, confidence, faith—let these pass on in front. Let them lead us in the battle. Priests, ministers, teachers—let them fall into line. And then the rereward—the people. God wants all! He wants you, and the cause needs you. Do you say you can't carry arms? You are timid, and possess but little or no strength? What of that? There is a place for you; see that you fill it. You can sustain and encourage those who are in front, and you will best do this by filling your place in the ranks. Do you say you can't preach? Do you tell us that it is impossible for you to take the pulpit or mount the platform, and address your fellows in eloquent words? You can support and pray for those whom God has called to blow the ram's horn and bear the solemn and sacred ark of the covenant of the gospel. You can march, you can share the conflict; God has a place for you. (*Chas. Leach, D.D.*) *The potency of inadequate instrumentalities*:—When we have clear indications of the Divine mind as to any course of action we are to advance to it promptly and without fear, even though the means at our disposal appear utterly inadequate to the object sought to be gained. No man goeth a warfare at his own charges in the service of God. The resources of infinite power avail for that service, and they are sure to be brought into play if it be undertaken for God's glory and in accordance with His will. Who could have supposed that the fishermen of Galilee would in the end triumph over all the might of kings and rulers; over all the influence of priesthoods and systems of worship enshrined in the traditions of centuries; over all the learning and intellect of the philosopher, and over all the prejudices and passions of the multitude? Who could have thought that the efforts of a poor German student in Berlin, on behalf of some neglected children, would expand into the widespread and well-rooted "Inner Mission" of Wichern? Or that the concern of a prison chaplain for the welfare of some of the prisoners after their release would develop into the worldwide work of Fliedner? Or that the distress of a kind-hearted medical student in London for a batch of poor boys who "didn't live nowhere," and whose pale faces, as they lay on a cold night on the roof of a shed, stirred in him an irrepressible compassion, would give birth to one of the marvels of London philanthropy—Dr. Barnardo's twenty institutions, caring for three to four thousand children, in connection with which the announcement could be made that no really destitute child was ever turned from its doors? When Carey on his shoemaker's stool contemplated the evangelisation of India, there was as great a gulf between the end and the apparent means as when the priests blew with their rams' horns round the walls of Jericho. But Carey felt it to be a Divine command, and Joshua-like set himself to obey it, leaving to God from whom it came to furnish the power by which the work was to be done. And wherever there have been found men and women of strong faith in God, who have looked on His will as recorded in the Scriptures with as much reverence as if it had been announced personally to themselves, and who have set themselves to obey that will with a sense of its reality and a faith in God's promised help like that of Joshua as the priests marched round Jericho, the same result has been realised: "The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad." (*W. G. Blaikie, D.D.*) *Discipline*:—1. Was it not of the nature of discipline that the men were to have

arms, and yet were not to use them? It is hard to have the weapon, to see the thing that is to be done, and to know that the proposed thing could be done by the use of the weapon, and yet to allow it to remain in disuse. This is part of the continual discipline of life; this is what we are all called upon to do to-day. We do not use all our faculties; sometimes we have almost to strip ourselves of our distinctive faculties, or to let them lie in disuse, and to be doing everything by doing nothing. This is part of a deeply-planned scheme of education. This is how Jesus Christ Himself conducted His own life in the sight of men. He did not use all His faculties; He did not call into requisition all His resources; He was quiet when He might have been restless, calm when He might have excited a tumult which would have had all the effect of an unexpected and irresistible storm. When one offered to defend Him, He said, "Nay, not thus; thou dost not understand the spirit of the kingdom; thinkest thou that I could not now pray unto My Father, and He would send twelve legions of angels, which would look all these petty enemies into dismay? We must not use all our resources. We have the strength, but do not resort to the tyranny of using it. Some things are to be accomplished by submission, patience, meekness; knowing the righteousness of the cause, we await the issue with imperturbable calm. But what a lesson this is to those who are impatient! Life without discipline is life without dignity. 2. Was it not, further, of the nature of discipline for the men to be in the midst of plenty and yet not touch it? (vers. 18, 19). To keep men back from things which they could so easily use and and so naturally appropriate, and to remain in comparative poverty in the very midst of abundance, is not easy. When we do not want the things, it is no trouble to let them alone; but when they are round about us, urging themselves upon us, and are almost clamorous in their appeal that we should appropriate them, to stand in their presence as with folded arms, and look upon them, not with contempt, but with a judgment that values them, yet with a conscience that will not appropriate them, is an attainment in religious manhood which we must not expect to secure without long training. This is part of the mystery of providence. Here it is that character discovers its quality. We are in reality what we are in critical circumstances. It is the exceptional hour that is the key to the lifetime. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." 3. Is it not in the nature of discipline to be in great excitement, and yet not to express it? "And Joshua had commanded the people, saying, Ye shall not shout, nor make any noise with your voice, neither shall any word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I bid you shout; then shall ye shout" (ver. 10). The instruction seems easy. Obedience under such circumstances would be most difficult. Who can keep down excitement—honest and honourable excitement? To shout under such circumstances as are described in the text is natural. Inborn instincts may be profaned, and the very voice of God within the soul may be mistaken. The whole kingdom of heaven is hindered in some instances because people will not hold their tongues. God knows when His people should shout, speak, pray, work; the distribution of parts, functions, duties, is with God. Here we clearly see that much detail must go before great results. It is not for us to take this work out of the Lord's hand. Be patient in the detail. It seems a long time since we began going round this awful hell. It seems to be encroaching upon us, rather than we seem to be encroaching upon its heat. Travel on! It is the fifth day; to-morrow is the sixth day; and the day after is the seventh day. "The Lord shall suddenly come to His temple." "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." How quickly he falls! (*J. Parker, D.D.*) **They burnt the city . . . and all that was therein.**—*Too polluted to be spared:*—Great were their offences whose possessions were too polluted to retain any value or become of any service to the people of God, and who not only themselves became a curse, but all that they had. This not unfrequently discovers itself in the transfer of ill-gotten wealth—a curse comes with it, which a new possession does not wipe off, but consumes and withers as though cankered and moth-eaten. It was not to enrich His people with the spoils of conquest that the Captain of their salvation led the march of triumph, but to inspire them with a holy detestation of sin, and especially the corruptions and impurities of idolatry, as the just cause of His vengeance. Nothing so entirely unfits men to live in this world, and so soon hastens them to another, even to depriving them of the common pity and forbearance of God, as the corruptions of idolatry, the sanctified impurities of a false religion. This proves infinitely worse in its nature. and unspeakably more dangerous in its influence, than would the positive absence

or total obliteration of all that bears the name of sanctity. In this view the admonition receives peculiar force as addressed by the apostle (1 Cor. x. 20, 21). (*W. Seaton.*) **The silver and the gold . . . they put into the treasury.**—*Booty given to God:*—Other cities would be conquered and their booty be divided among the people, but in this case all was to be given to God. No one was to be richer for those marches and that tremendous slaughter except as every one was richer when the treasure was dedicated to God. It was enough to be delivered by His help from so formidable a foe, who held the two main passes to the hill country above, an enemy too powerful to be left unconquered in their rear. Besides, all that was God's was theirs. As well might a son begrudge the increasing wealth of his father in whose prosperity his own interests were enhanced. But the fact that one man, Achan, did covet and then conceal a goodly Babylonish mantle, with some silver and gold that he found, shows how real was the temptation, yet how magnificently it was resisted. Only one man among all those thousands played the thief. How splendid, then, was the fidelity of the many! (*C. S. Bushnell.*) *Seems not this too severe to forbid the soldiers the spoils of the city?*—1. It was wonderful continency in the soldiery, now wanting all things of country provisions, by their so long wandering in the wilderness. 2. Jericho was the firstfruits of that cursed country, so must wholly be devoted to God, and offered up a whole burnt-offering. 3. The hungry soldiers might have been so glutted with the spoils of this rich city that it would in all likelihood have made them fitter for idleness and luxury than for marching forward in a martial conquest of Canaan. 4. The whole army being thus admonished by the prohibition of their expected prey, might understand that the conquest of Jericho was accomplished solely by the almighty power of God, and not by any of their prowess and valour, as was afterwards done in subduing all the other cities. 5. This severity was exercised upon this city at their first landing in Canaan, to strike the greater terror upon the other Canaanitish cities, which they had to conquer, and, if possible, to bring them to repentance and submission. (*C. Ness.*) **Joshua saved Rahab the harlot alive.**—*Rahab saved:*—It has not been the lot of Rahab to share the devout interest which has been lavished on Mary Magdalene. Our Correggios, Titians, and Carlo Dolcis have not attempted to represent the spirit of contrition and devotion transfiguring the face of the Canaanite girl. And this is not surprising. Rahab had never seen the human face of Jesus, nor heard the words that dropped like honey from His lips. But though she was not one of those whose contrite and holy love painters delight to represent, she belonged to the same order, and in some respects is more remarkable than any of the New Testament penitents. For her light was much dimmer than theirs who lived in the days of the Son of Man. She was utterly without support or sympathy from those among whom she lived, for with the exception of her own relations, who seem to have been influenced by herself, not a creature in Jericho shared her faith, or showed the slightest regard for the God of Israel. But the time has now come for her to reap the reward of her faith and its works. In her case there was but a short interval between the sowing and the reaping. And God showed Himself able to do in her exceeding abundantly above what she could ask or think. For she was not only protected when Jericho and all its people were destroyed, but incorporated with the children of Israel. No doubt the scarlet cord was hung from her window, as had been arranged with the spies. And a happy woman she no doubt was when she saw the faces of her old guests, and under their protection was brought out with all her kindred and all that she had and led to a place of safety. It is a blessed time, after you have stood fast to duty while many have failed, when the hour comes that brings you peace and blessing, while it carries confusion and misery to the faithless. How thankful one is at such a moment for the grace that enabled one to choose the right! What do we not gain by patience when we do the right and wait for the reward? One of the pictures in the Interpreter's House is that of "a little room where sat two little children, each in his chair. The name of the eldest was Passion, and of the other Patience. Passion seemed much discontent, but Patience was very quiet. Then asked Christian, 'What is the reason of the discontent of Passion?' The Interpreter answered, 'The Governor of them would have them stay for his best things till the beginning of the next year; but he will have them all now; but Patience is willing to wait.'" The case of Rahab was one of those where whole families were saved on account of the faith of one member. The head of a Hebrew house was eminently a representative man, and by a well-understood and recognised law his family were implicated in his acts, whether for good or for evil. But in this case the protector of the family, the

member of it that determines the fate of the whole, is not the one whom the law recognises, but his child, his daughter. A woman occupies here a higher and more influential place, in relation to the rest of the family, than she has ever held at any previous time. The incident comes in as a kind of foreshadow of what was to be abundantly verified in after-times. This narrative shows it to be in the line of God's providence that sisters and daughters shall prove instruments of deliverance to their relations. It is blessed when they are so even in earthly things, but far more glorious when, through faith and prayer and unwearied interest, they are enabled to win them to Christ, and turn them into living epistles for Him. But let us now advert to the reception of Rahab and her household into the nation and Church of the Israelites. At first they could be treated only as unclean until the rites of purification should be performed. In the case of Rahab this was doubly necessary—owing to her race, and owing to her life. Thereafter they were admitted to the commonwealth of Israel, and had an interest in the covenants of promise. The ceremonial purification and the formal admission signified little, except in so far as they represented the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Ghost. "Where sin abounded grace did much more abound." When the enemy ensnares a woman, wiles her into the filthiest chambers of sin, and so enchains her there that she cannot escape, but must sink deeper and deeper in the mire, the case is truly hopeless. More rapidly and more thoroughly than in the case of a man, the leprosy spreads till every virtuous principle is rooted out, and every womanly feeling is displaced by the passions of a sensual reprobate. "Son of man, can these bones live?" Is there any art to breathe the breath of purity and pure love into that defiled soul? Can such a woman ever find her home on the mountains of spices, and hear a loving bridegroom say, "My love, my undefiled is but one"? It is just here that the religion of the Bible achieves its highest triumphs. We say the religion of the Bible, but we should rather say, that gracious Being whose grace the Bible unfolds. "The things that are impossible with men are possible with God." Jesus Christ is the Prince of Life. Living faith in a living and loving Saviour can do all things. We wonder whether Rahab obtained much help in her new life from the fellowship of those among whom she came when she joined the Church. If the Church then was what the Church ever ought to be, if its outstanding members were like the three fair damsels, Prudence, Piety, and Charity, in the Palace Beautiful, no doubt she would be helped greatly. But it is not very often that that emblem is realised. And strange to say, among the members of our Churches now we usually find a very imperfect sense of the duty which they owe to those who come among them from without, and especially out of great wickedness. It is quite possible that Rahab was chilled by the coldness of some of her Hebrew sisters, looking on her as an intruder, a reprobate, and grieved because their select society was broken in upon by this outlandish woman. And it is quite possible that she was disappointed to find that, though they were nominally the people of God, there was very little of what was Divine or heavenly about them. So it often happens that what ought to be the greatest attraction in a Church, the character of its members, is the greatest repellant. Will the day ever be when every one that names the name of Christ shall be a living epistle, known and read of all men? But however she may have been affected by the spirit of those among whom she came, Rahab undoubtedly attained to a good degree before God, and a place of high honour in the Hebrew community. It was well for her that what at first arrested and impressed her was not anything in the people of Israel; it was the glorious attributes of their God. For this would preserve her substantially from disappointment. Men might change, or they might pass away, but God remained the same yesterday and to-day and for ever. (*W. G. Blaikie, D.D.*)

Cursed be the man . . . that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho.—*The unprosperous builder:*—Here is a terrible denunciation, under a curse, of the destruction of the family of that person that should labour to build up Jericho again. As in blessing there are three things considerable, that come near one another—a blessing, a prayer, and a prophecy—so is it likewise in cursing: there is a prayer that God would pour forth His vengeance upon the enemies of the Church, and a prophetical prediction that God will do it. "Cursed be the man before the Lord." That is, let him be cursed indeed. That that is done before the Lord is truly and solemnly done. This was a solemn curse, a heavy curse, and it did truly light upon him. And let him be cursed before the Lord, however the world bless him. "That riseth and builds this city Jericho." Why would not God have Jericho built again? 1. Partly because He would have it a perpetual remem-

brance of His goodness and merciful dealing with His people, passing over Jordan and coming freshly into Canaan; for we are all subject to forget. If this city had been built again, the memory of it would have been forgotten; but lying all waste and desolate, the passers by would ask the cause—as God speaks of His own people—"What is the reason that this city lies thus?" And then it would give them occasion of speaking of the mercy of God to His people. And likewise it would give occasion to speak of the justice of God against the idolatrous inhabitants, whose sins were grown ripe. 2. And likewise it was dedicated to God as the firstfruits. Being one of the chief mother cities of the land, it was dedicated and consecrated to God as a thing severed; it was to be for ever severed from common use. There are two ways of severing things from common use: one by way of destruction, as here the city of Jericho; another by way of dedication, as the gold of Jericho. God would have this city severed from common use, as a perpetual monument and remembrance of His mercy and justice. 3. And likewise for terror to the rest of the inhabitants; for usually great conquerors set up some terrible example of justice to terrify others. Now, this being one of the first cities after their passing over Jordan, God would have the destruction of it to strike terror, together with this sentence of a curse, upon all that should build it again for ever. 4. And then that this terrible sentence might be a means to draw others to come in to God's people to join with them, and submit, and prevent their destruction, seeing how terribly God had dealt with Jericho. (*R. Sibbes, D.D.*) *The curse of Jericho*:—I. Let us listen to THE CURSE PRONOUNCED. Such an act of destruction was clearly directed in that law which Joshua was to ponder day and night. It was the first city that Joshua had taken, and he was bound to act according to the directions laid down by Moses (Deut. xiii. 15–18). Joshua therefore had no choice as regards Jericho. Other conquerors, for their own pride and self-glorification, have ordained that fair cities should be levelled with the dust and their sites sown with salt. Thus was it with Troy, Carthage, Sidon. Joshua did this as he did all things, in obedience to the Divine command. Jericho was "cursed before the Lord," *i.e.*, from God's presence and by His sentence. But did this dreadful destruction serve any good purpose? Yes, truly. Here we have sermons in stones, far more intelligible and emphatic even than those with which the book of nature is filled. To begin with, inasmuch as they are tokens of a just and long-deferred judgment on wickedness, they sound a loud note of warning to the impenitent. Especially do they display the terrible nature of the sin of idolatry and its consequent evils. Would they not be impressive witnesses against Israel in every evil day of apostasy? And would they not also give encouragement to every faithful heart that strove to follow the Lord fully? Pious souls could read these words writ in large characters on every one of them, "Not by might, nor by power, nor by wisdom, but by faith, is the victory won"; and the practical conclusion was plain: "Faithful to God, you can never know defeat." Thus these stones would also emphasise the truth, that in the greatest triumphs and the most brilliant successes there is no room for pride or boastfulness or self-sufficiency on the part of man. Always these stones would say, "His right hand and His holy arm hath gotten Him the victory." What a stimulus therefore to truthful and healthful effort would these stones become! II. But the time came when THE CURSE WAS DESPISED. It may seem incredible that a curse so plain, so terrible, so memorable, should be thought so little of, but when we read the Divine record we can clearly trace the causes of this sinful audacity. To begin with, there was a popular cause for this despisal. It was done in a day when Israel's God was forgotten, when spiritual life was very low, when public sentiment was degraded, when open impiety reigned in high places, and only one solitary man stood out an open witness against the evils of the day. The very sins for which Jericho was destroyed were rampant and popular in Israel (1 Kings xvi. 30–33). How significant are the words, "In his days." There were many bad, but none worse than they. It is also instructive to notice that the builder was a Bethelite. Hiel had come under the full influence of all the evil principles that were rampant. He was born and bred, he lived and died, at Bethel, the metropolis of idolatry, the place in which Jeroboam had set up his calf. There was also a sceptical cause which led to the despising of the curse. Unbelief was at the bottom of Hiel's impious act, as it is the root of every evil work. Perhaps he had reasoned thus. The curse, if there ever was any force in it, must have spent itself by this time. Unbelief forgot whose curse this was. It could not get beyond the lip of Joshua to the will of the changeless and almighty Jehovah. Or perhaps Hiel had said: "It is nothing but

an old wives' fable, unworthy of credence; an old-fashioned jingle, without a particle of meaning; an apocryphal curse, to explain an apocryphal miracle: or at the very utmost, granting that it has some historical basis, it can be nothing more than the expression of Joshua's ill-nature and ill-feeling, and therefore is a fossilised manifestation of the narrow, bitter, bigoted age in which he lived. The supposition that it is a Divine proclamation is utterly absurd, utterly inconsistent with the nature of things. It would be neither just nor wise nor loving in God to do so. Such a curse as that does not commend itself to my conscience, reason, or heart, and therefore it is unworthy of credence." Hiel, having stood in the way of sinners, would not be long in sitting in the seat of the scornful. And perhaps the governing and most potent of these concurrent causes was a purely materialistic one. Hiel may have said to himself and others, "You see I am a practical man of business. I am neither a prophet nor a prophet's son. Profit, not prophecy, is my *forte*. Now look, did you ever see such a splendid site?" (Had Hiel lived in our days he could have drawn up a splendid prospectus for a limited liability building company.) "And what a delicious climate this valley enjoys; even in mid-winter the air is bright and balmy. And see, the building material is lying around, ready to be used. The site can be got for an old song, on account of that ridiculous superstition about Joshua, which has scared so many chicken-hearted noodles. Do you shake your head and say there may be some truth in it? What care I? I see plainly how I can make money out of this. You to your books and me to my buildings, and every man to his own trade." It was not so very difficult then for Hiel to despise the curse of Joshua; even so it is not difficult for any one to despise the curse of the gospel. The spirit of the age, whether as expressed by common talk, or the newspaper press, or current literature, is in favour of such a despisal. There are also sceptical reasons which conduce to the same end. The record which contains this curse is old and not trustworthy, say some. The curse is decrepit and antiquated. The edge of the sword of judgment is blunt and its blade is rusty. The Lord is slack concerning His threatenings. We are too enlightened and liberal nowadays to believe in these things. But perhaps the great reason why men will not take heed to this curse is because they are so absorbed in the things of time and sense that they can think of nothing else. III. Now NOTICE THE FULFILMENT OF THE CURSE. Hiel was full of his great life-work. The plans have been drawn, the trenches have been dug, the stones arranged and prepared, multitudes of labourers engaged. There is to be a grand opening ceremony at the laying of the foundation stone; therefore the members of his family and his numerous relations and friends flock from all quarters. It is a most auspicious occasion. But in the midst of the ceremony his firstborn is seized with a sudden sickness; he falls in a swoon, and is carried away from the crowd. But by and by a messenger with a sorrowful countenance returns and whispers into Hiel's ear, "Abiram is dead." It was a terrible blow, in this hour of his father's triumph to be cut down. But perhaps, his friends would say, the excitement of the ceremony was too much for him. He had never been very strong, and was complaining for some time, and this must have been heat apoplexy, a sunstroke. But though Abiram's death was a great interruption, the work must be carried on all the same. At last it is all but finished. There is nothing left but the putting up of the gates. Absorbed in his great undertaking, he has been able to drive away ominous thoughts and what he calls superstitious fears! But there is growing on him, as he nears the completion of the work, a nervous anxiety that he cannot drive away. On one thing he is resolved—there shall be no public ceremonial at the closing of the work, as there was at the commencement. He will superintend the putting up of the gates himself, and not permit any of his children to be present. As he was thus busily occupied at the finishing touch of his great work, a messenger arrived in hot haste from Bethel, fourteen miles distant, with the doleful news, "Segub is dead." Thus was the curse of Joshua concerning Jericho fulfilled. Learn from this how faithful are God's words, the terrible as well as the gracious. No jot or tittle of His truth ever fails. His word may remain in abeyance for many years, but the lapse of time can never destroy its vitality, "The Word of the Lord endureth for ever." See also how infatuated is unbelief. Every blow hardens rather than softens. Behold also the bitter fruits of unbelief. Pleasant and profitable Hiel thought his work would be; perhaps this very speculation was more for his children's benefit than for his own; but the solemn narrative teaches that there can be no lasting profit for us or ours if we run contrary to God's Word, if we deny His will. IV. But we can turn to a more grateful scene, and consider THE REMOVAL

OF THE CURSE. Jericho was rebuilt in disobedience to a command, in defiance of a threatening, and at the awful cost of the builder's children; yet it was not demolished. God had better things in store for it. His prophets and His people were permitted to dwell there, and though there was much that was pleasant and attractive in it, it was an uncomfortable residence. The curse seemed to hover over it and linger within its walls (2 Kings iii. 19–22). Thus the curse of Joshua is removed. Strange cure this; the old curse met by the new cruse; the old word of judgment removed by the new word of healing. "Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters." How strange that the salt of the new cruse should abolish the bitterness of the old spring—passing strange. Yet can we not here see the symbol of higher truth? Can we not see Jesus and His salvation in this strange action of that prophet so like Himself? Each human being is like Jericho. "The city of Mansoul," "the house we live in," is it not like Jericho, pleasant for situation, fair in its outlook? Our powers and faculties of mind and body, the possibilities of our nature, are all that could be desired; yet the water of spiritual health is naught and the ground barren. We are lying under a curse. But see, the Saviour comes. The wonder-working wood for the bitterness of Marah and the wonder-working salt for the spring of Jericho, both picture that cross and passion by which Jesus has removed the curse. Yes, and the world itself is also like Jericho. Is it not fair and beautiful; most pleasant for situation? Every prospect pleases. But there is a deadly drawback, "The water is naught and the land barren." Death reigns. "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain, waiting." Yes, waiting; waiting the coming of Him who brings healing and life and fruitfulness with Him; to welcome whose arrival all creatures will shout for joy, for there shall be no more curse. His presence will bless us with Eden again. (*A. B. Mackay.*)

CHAPTER VII.

VER. 1. **But the children of Israel committed a trespass.**—*Corporate responsibility:*—This is here attributed to the whole people, which was really the act of but one man or one family. This is not because of any guilty participation in this trespass by others; there is no intimation that any others of the people were involved in a like crime. Nor is there any implication that others were privy to the crime of Achan, and by concealment of the fact became its abettors and sharers in its guilt. In all probability his act was not known or suspected beyond the limits of his own family. Nevertheless, Israel was one people, and it is here dealt with as one corporate body. There was criminality in the midst of them. And it was necessary that it should be disavowed and punished, in order that the people might be freed from all complicity and connection with it. (*W. H. Green, D.D.*) *Destruction a duty:*—Many a thing which is attractive in itself ought to be destroyed; and if it ought to be destroyed, it ought not to be preserved. The contents of a saloon, or of a gambling-house, books and pictures which are harmful in themselves, which are, by their owners or by the public authorities, devoted to destruction, ought to be destroyed. To preserve any portion of them, under such circumstances, would be a wrong on the part of him whose duty it was to destroy them. To preserve a private letter which is entrusted to one to destroy is not in itself an act of theft, but it is an inexcusable breach of trust; and if no one else in the world is ever harmed by it, the one who preserves the letter is the worse for so doing. The destroying of that which ought to be destroyed is as clearly one's duty in its place, as the preserving of that which ought to be preserved. (*H. C. Trumbull.*)

Vers. 2–5. **They fled before the men of Ai.**—*The true measure of strength:*—In every estimate of work to be done by men, or by money, the moral element ought to be taken into account as an important factor. Napoleon's thought was that "God is on the side of the heaviest battalions." But Napoleon did not consider the relative weight of battalions by God's method of weighing them. One man's strength may be as "the strength of ten, because his heart is pure"; and where two thousand righteous men would be more than sufficient for a work of God, twenty thousand wrong-hearted men may fail. The true measure of the strength

of any local Church is in the number and power of its godly men and women, not in the show of its men and women of wealth and intellect and social standing. One good teacher in a Sunday-school has more real power there than a score of unworthy ones. And it is with money as with men. The need of the Church in both the home and the foreign field to-day is not so much mere money, but better gifts. Ten dollars with a blessing will count for more in God's work than ten thousand dollars without a blessing. It is not true that one man's money is as good as another's, nor that money gained by one means is as good as money gained by another. (*Ibid.*) *Joshua's lesson after the defeat at Ai:*—Jericho, according to the Divine promise, had fallen before Israel. It was evident that this remarkable event had happened through the direct interposition of the power of God. It is scarcely to be wondered at that such a triumph bred self-confidence. And, flushed with their recent and easily-gained success, the victors were in haste to add to their laurels by the conquest of Ai. Here was an unlooked-for catastrophe. The Lord's chosen people discomfited and dispersed in their second battle, a ground of insulting and contemptuous rejoicing given to the idolatrous Canaanites. And thus the Divine purpose stood, apparently, in danger of disgraceful frustration. Such thoughts were evidently jostling each other, like a medley crowd, in the mind of Joshua. And, confused beyond the possibility of calm reflection by their influence, he casts himself in despair before the ark of the Lord. With what wonderful illuminating power must the answer have come to him, "Get thee up; wherefore liest thou upon thy face"! What a call to common-sense action on the lines of faith is here! A little reflection might have shown to Joshua that the fault, whatever it was, could not lie at Jehovah's door. In place of useless whimpering over the past, vigorous examination was needed to remove the lurking evil. Sanctification, as before Jericho, was urgently required. And as for the honour of the name of the Lord, it was never in danger. This first defeat would give caution to the warriors of Israel, while, under the improved conditions about to be set up, it would act as an unfailing lure to the victors of Ai. Now this leaf out of the life of a good servant of God is well fitted to teach us many useful lessons. I. A LESSON AS TO THE RIGHT TREATMENT OF A DIVINE MYSTERY. It is easy to conceive of Joshua as emulating the example of a rationalist, had the prototype of that much-belauded school existed in his time. In that case he would have called the leaders of his army together, and subjected them to a severe cross-examination. He would have proposed a long list of questions as to the condition of the arms of the people, the manner of their leadership and its blunders, the time and apparent causes of the panic. And having exhausted his critical powers in the vain endeavour to discover some adequate cause for the catastrophe, he would have proceeded to distribute blame all round. At the same time, sapiently shaking his head over the problem, he would decide to "rest and be thankful" without further efforts at the conquest of the country. Or he would set himself to prove conclusively that after all the success at Jericho was due to accident, or purely natural causes, and that the whole scheme of Canaan conquest was based on a mistake. In this he might, not improbably, easily find scientific heads to help him. There would be sages who would invoke the aid of the discoveries of their time to show that the Jordan was divided, and the walls of Jericho fell from the operation of ordinary physical laws. The phenomena were special, but not supernaturally so. Or Joshua might have chosen a third course, and abandoned himself to surly grumbling or useless repining at the hard lot of a popular leader under a so-called "theocracy." Joshua's primitive faith—or, as some would say, simplicity—was far wiser and more useful. And just as, turn the compass as you may, the needle will point to the pole, so, let circumstances be what they might, Joshua's trust always drew him towards God's oracle. The man of the world might call it childish, fatalistic credulity. At all events the issue proved it to be the right, the wisest thing to do. In like manner our true wisdom lies in taking our difficulties to God. Second causes, in the shape of natural law, human ignorance or frailty, have their sphere in the economy of the Divine government, but God is supreme over all. II. IT IS NOT ALWAYS SAFE TO TRUST OUR ZEAL FOR THE DIVINE HONOUR. Doubtless Joshua thought with Elijah in later times, "I have been very zealous for the Lord of hosts," while he was really only fathering Israel's sin upon Jehovah. And similar mistakes are not unfrequently made by godly men, and often with the best intentions. There are some facts which exist, and some which are threatened, which seem to reflect upon the nature and government of God. And in order, as it is supposed, to conserve Jehovah's honour, infinite effort is expended to cast doubt upon the facts or to qualify the declarations. Could

we but touch the bottom of such "zeal for God" we might be surprised to discover that after all there is more in it which—unconsciously, it is true—tends to conserve human weakness and sin rather than the glory of our Divine Ruler. A similar remark applies to very much in our own estimate of the success of the gospel. Often we hear, and perhaps oftener are tempted to indulge in our hearts, doubts as to the power of the glorious gospel. Progress is so slow that men are quick to discover that the machinery of evangelical ministry has become obsolete, and its teachings effete. But the lesson ought rather to be earnest inquiry as to our fitness or otherwise for the success we crave. Is the cause in ourselves, or our easily improvable methods? Or does the hidden mischief lie in those with whom we work? There needs but the removal of "the accursed thing" for success to return to us, and our despondent dirge shall then speedily become a song of victory. III. The narrative, moreover, suggests to us THE RIGHT METHOD OF REGARDING AFFLICTIONS. It is wise here to have a fixed belief in an overruling Providence, but we must not allow this to hinder our full cognisance of second causes. And it will be well for us if in any special trial, while we are ready, with all submission, to bow to the Divine decree, we carefully ask what there is in us of indiscretion or sin which has procured, or been accessory to, our sufferings; and then, in earnest reliance upon Divine grace, let us seek altogether to remove it. IV. SANCTIFICATION FOR GOD'S SERVICE OFTEN INVOLVES THE SEARCHING OUT AND REMOVAL OF HIDDEN AND UNSUSPECTED SINS. There was only one Achan in the camp, and his offence was known only to himself and God. Nevertheless, no success can rest on the arms of Israel until he is found out and destroyed. Let us not forget the important lesson which this is so well fitted to teach. Sin comes to us in such insidious ways, and uses agents so dear to us, that it succeeds in taking up its abode in our hearts before we are aware of its presence. Have we an Achan in the camp? If so, let us seek to extirpate the evil. (*J. Dann.*) *Israel defeated at Ai*:—I. THE DIVINE DISPLEASURE AT HUMAN SIN. This was not a new lesson to the Israelites. At Sinai, at Kadesh, at Peor, it had been taught them; but, under new temptations, they needed renewed instruction. Sin unrepented and unforsaken provokes God's changeless displeasure. Such displeasure is a part of eternal justice. We magnify the grace of God, but grace is only a fragment of His character; it co-exists with justice. II. THE MANY MAY BE PUNISHED FOR THE SINS OF ONE. God does not deal with men as individuals only. There is a corporate unity of the family, the Church, the State, which He regards; and, as the good deeds of one benefit all, the sins of one bring evil upon all. In this matter, God's thought is often not as ours. No modern leader, after the sack of a city, would be surprised to find an Achan in every tent. Might not, then, the one have been pardoned for the sake of the self-restraint of the many? At least, might not the guilty one have suffered all the consequences of his crime, without involving his innocent fellows? Such questions we are not competent to decide. Only a far-seeing Wisdom, which can fully fathom motives and forecast all the results of individual sins, can tell when to be gracious and forgiving, and when to punish. The war against the idolatrous races of Palestine was not to degenerate into pillage, a school for covetousness and selfishness for the victors; and so, at the beginning, such a lesson was needed as would make each afraid of private transgression, and also watchful of others. III. THE DEFEAT AT AI ILLUSTRATES THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HUMAN SAGACITY AND DIVINE GUIDANCE. The Israelites were so strangely unteachable that they did not clearly distinguish between the two. The victory at Jericho was clearly not theirs, but God's. But, in the flush of victory, this was forgotten. Israel rejoiced in her own success. Prosperity brought presumption, out of which grew the ill-advised expedition against Ai. It is easy for the Church to repose confidence in the stability and strength of her own organisation, and in smoothly-running ecclesiastical machinery, to find the sure augury of her success. Then some spiritual Ai must needs recall us to the truth that the victories of the kingdom of heaven are "not by might nor by power," but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts. IV. THERE IS GREAT DANGER IN UNDERESTIMATING THE POWER OF AN ADVERSARY. The easy success at Jericho made Israel over-confident. A Southern historian of the rebellion has recorded his opinion that the first battle at Bull Run was a serious misfortune to the Southern cause. It led to mistaken confidence. Great numbers of volunteers left the Southern army and returned home, believing the war ended. Thoughtful writers at the North agree that it helped the Northern cause, for it taught us not to despise the enemy, and set clearly before us the magnitude of the conflict. And this has its parallel in the conflicts of the spiritual life. After Jericho, Ai. There is no commoner mistake

than the belief that following some great victory will be peaceful conquest, the rest of Canaan. There is no earthly Canaan. V. IT IS FOLLY TO TRUST IN PAST EXPERIENCES. The three thousand men who went up against Ai were full of confidence which grew out of the successes at the Jordan and at Jericho. They assumed the presence and guidance of God because of His past deliverances. They knew what had happened; from this they formed a doctrine of probabilities of what would happen. They learned the truth of the maxim, "It is a part of probability that many improbable things will happen." We cannot measure our present relation to God by the past. The past may give us ground for hope, but there is no science of spiritual probabilities. "There are factors in the spiritual life which can change the face of things to any extent, and which hide from all calculations of the probable." Christian progress is by "forgetting the things that are behind." Have we a living faith to-day? (*Sermons by the Monday Club.*) *The diseases that stop England's mercies:*—In this chapter you have a treatise concerning Achan's sin, branching itself into three parts; one concerning the commission of the sin, the second concerning the discovery of it, and the third concerning the punishment thereof. Oh, what unexpected ways and means hath God to bring out men's sin to light. Three thousand men flee before the men of Ai, and thirty-six men are slain, and this was made the means of discovery of Achan's sin; who would have thought that there should have been such a discovery as this? The work was hindered by this defeat, and that sets them on work to search out the cause, and shows—1. That afflictions should set us on work, to search out our sins, and the cause of them. 2. That sins shall not always be pocketed up, but shall be discovered, though never so secret. 3. That God hath strange ways to discover men's sins. First, where God is in a way of mercy towards His people, there sin does make a stoppage in His proceedings; so here God was in a way of mercy towards His people, carrying of them into the land of Canaan, but in the way they sin, Achan plays the thief; mark what a stoppage this made in the way of mercy; so you have it in chap. xxiv. 20, Jer. xxviii. 9. Sins committed when God is in a way of mercy are a slighting of mercy. Again, those mercies that come unto God's people come unto them in the way of a promise, and therefore if men do not keep the condition, God takes Himself free, and will turn Himself out of the way of His mercy. You have an expression to this purpose (Num. xiv. 34). God never gives His people any mercy, but He gives it them in a way of mercy. He does not think it enough to give them that which is mercy, but He will give it them in a way of mercy. But now if God should be in a way of mercy towards His people, and they sin against Him, and He should go on to give them the mercy, they would be hardened in their sin, and so it would not come unto them in the way of mercy. Therefore, if God be in a way of mercy towards His people, and they sin against Him, He will break off the course of His mercy, and go another way, and there shall be a stoppage made in these proceedings. Why should this be, that so small a sin should turn the great God of heaven out of the way of His mercy? Achan commits but a small sin, and what a mighty stop is made in the way of mercy! For answer three things—1. There is nothing between God and us. I may boldly say thus much, that men sin a great sin in saying their sin is small. 2. Sometimes what falls short in the greatness of the sin is made up in the number of sins. It may be that the number of your little sins amount to the greatest sin. 3. God will make good His name to the utmost, and His name is, "A jealous God." But what evil and hurt is in this, if a final stoppage be not made? Is it nothing in your ears, and in your hearts, that the Lord should turn out of a way of mercy? If there be a stoppage made in England's mercy, though but present, there is an obstruction in all your comforts: you are sensible of the obstructions of your body, will you not be sensible of State obstructions, of Church obstructions? Again, when a man does not rely and live upon God's all-sufficiency, when God hath appeared in that way. Abusing of God's instruments which He raiseth up for to do His work by, doth exceedingly provoke and make a stoppage in the mercy of God. Carrying on the work of reformation, and the great affairs of the Church, upon the shoulders of human prudence, will make a stoppage in the way of mercy. As prayer and humiliation do exceedingly further the work of God in the hands of His people, so the falling and slacking of the hands in these two works doth make a stop in mercy, and hath done in our mercy. An unthankful receiving of the mercies that God hath given us, and a slight beholding of the great works He hath done before us lately, is another sin that hath made a stoppage in our mercy. The last sin that makes a stop in England's mercy is a worldly disposition, whereby a man hangs back unto the

great work of God, and the glorious reformation that is now a-doing. I shall show you it is a hard thing to appease God's anger when it is gone out. It must be done, and that quickly. I shall show you what you shall do, that you may do it. Therefore it is an exceeding hard thing and very difficult to appease God's anger. If the sea break over the banks, and there are but few to stop it, it is hard to do; if fire hath taken two or three houses in a street, and but few to quench it, it is hard to do: the fire of God's anger is broken out, and there are but few to quench it: it is a hard thing, therefore. Again, God seems to be engaged in the way of His wrath. Oh, it is a hard thing to turn God from His anger! But it must be done, and done quickly. There are six things that Joshua did here, when they fled before the men of Ai. 1. He was very sensible of God's stroke that was given to them, for he says, Lord, would we had been contented in the wilderness. 2. He was humbled under God's hand, for it is said, he rent his clothes, and fell down upon the earth. 3. And he prayed, and cried mightily unto God, as you read in the chapter. 4. And he put away the evil of their doings. 5. And he punished Achan, the offender. 6. He made a holy resignation. And there must be a concurrence of all these six things if we would bring God back into the way of His mercy towards England. (*W. Bridge, M.A.*) *Sources of weakness*:—1. Here is a Church with all the outward elements of strength, prosperity, and efficiency. The mass of members are orderly and in good standing. But it has a "name to live while it is dead." God frowns upon it. And why? There are notoriously unworthy members in it—perhaps rich and influential—and they are tolerated year after year. And there is not spiritual life and conscience enough in the body to cast them out! And so the whole Church is cursed for their sake! 2. Here is a city numbering 800,000 strong, with hundreds of Churches and able pastors, and scores of thousands of respectable members, and education and schools and wealth, and all the elements that should insure social virtue and general thrift, and God's abundant and abiding blessing. But there is a moral blot upon it. There is an "accursed thing" winked at. A handful of corrupt officials are suffered to rule it and curse it. Gambling, drinking, crime, are suffered to run riot. There is power in the mass, in the Christian element, to put it down, stamp it out. But it is not invoked. And so the whole city has to suffer the shame and ignominy and loss. The pulpit, the Church, virtue, law, are all shorn of their strength. For God will not wink at such things, if His people do; and so "Ichabod" is written on that city. 3. Here is a community in which a horrible crime has been committed—a man shot down in cold blood for his fidelity to truth or virtue or the public welfare. The blood of that man God will require of that entire community, unless they exhaust every resource of law and society to bring the guilty to punishment! We may narrow the circle to the individual, and the principle will still apply. One sin in the heart will neutralise a thousand virtues in the life. One secret offence will make a man a coward in the face of the world. One moral weakness will spoil a whole character. (*J. M. Sherwood, D.D.*) *Defeat through miscalculation*:—This old story of the battle at Ai is paralleled in all its essential features in every age and country. Some unrecognised weakness, some unforeseen turn of events, confuses the most careful calculations and neutralises the most elaborate preparations. Probably the splendid military strategy of Napoleon was never more clearly illustrated than in his plan of the battle of Waterloo; and yet a little strip of sunken road, which was overlooked in the preliminary survey of the engineers, threw all his calculations into disarray and lost him the battle and the empire of Europe. Some unnoticed defect in the machinery negatives the skill of the captain and the seamanship of the crew of the Atlantic steamer. It was only an insignificant bubble of air, overlooked in the foundry when the steel was wrought, but it resulted in weakness in the core of the main shaft, and in the supreme hour of trial there is failure and disaster. Some lack of fibre in character, and the time comes when the man who supposed himself sufficient for anything finds himself unequal to the emergency. And these unforeseen interferences and checks are nowhere so common and so potential as in the department of religious life. A low type of piety is not necessarily or probably the result of a resolution to be satisfied with a certain level of spiritual attainment. I believe that at heart the majority of Christian men and women desire and attempt to be and do the best and most possible, but there is some defect of will, some infirmity of temper, some unwillingness to surrender to God what may be considered an unimportant particular, and so long as that hindrance is in the way, our prayers and struggles for better and larger growth are unavailing, and the influence of that obstacle continually makes itself more and more felt for evil. And what is true of

the individual Christian life is true also of the life and progress of the Christian Church as a whole. That Church has made great advances and won not a few triumphs at various periods and in certain directions. At the same time it is true that the Church ought to have accomplished greater things, ought to be doing far more than it is to-day. It is God's Church, and He abides in it, and that of itself is a warrant for imperial greatness. What conquest is too vast to be expected when the Lord of hosts marshals the forces that are enlisted to win it? With such portents and prophecies of triumph, why should there be any discouragement, or half-heartedness, or laggard marches, or unwilling hands, or partial successes? Why was not the promise fulfilled long ago, that "the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ"? A great deal is said in our time about the need of a working Church. There is another need quite as great—the need of a Church through which God can work. It is not the method and spirit of the working of the Church, so much as the way and the extent in which and to which it is wrought upon of the Divine Spirit that determines its efficiency. It is the folly of the Church of this age that it spends so much ingenuity in devising machinery and too little time in preparing the way of the Lord and making His paths straight. No wisdom, nor eloquence, nor marvel of contrivance can make good the lack of a devoted and submissive spirit that waits and waits and still waits with the inquiry: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Let us have that in the Church, a singleness of union with God, and then, through the membership, the converting energy from on high will flow unhindered, and men be reached and transformed. (*E. S. Atwood.*) *Hindered by sin*:—1. As a matter of fact, there are unexplained checks in human progress. We wonder why we do not advance more surely and quickly. 2. Such checks bring Divine providence under criticism and suspicion (vers. 6–9). This is an easy refuge for men. Providence has had to sustain many a slander. It seems the handiest of all things to blame the mysteriousness of the Divine way. Who ever says, "The fault must be within the house itself; let every man in the house be examined; somebody is to blame for this mystery—who is it?" But it is easier to sit down under the supposed comforting doctrine that all this is meant for our good; it is chastisement; it is part of the mysterious process of human education At the same time it must be remembered that the sufferer himself may not be personally guilty. Certainly Joshua was no criminal in this case; yet Joshua suffered more than any other man. Here we may find the mysteriousness of the Divine action. This is not an action of mere virtue, as it is socially understood and limited; it is the very necessity of God: He cannot touch "the accursed thing"; He cannot smile upon fraud. A new light is thus thrown upon sovereignty and God's elective laws. God elects righteousness, pureness, simplicity, nobleness. He will forsake Israel if Israel forsake Him. The Lord gives the reason why we are stopped. We must go to Heaven to find out why we are not making more money, more progress, more solidity of position. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Vers. 6–9. **Joshua . . . fell . . . before the ark of the Lord.**—*Joshua's plea before the ark*:—The ark was the centre of mercy to Israel, and the glory of the tabernacle, their refuge in trouble, their security in danger, and their deliverance in distress. Here they mourned, and made supplication, where the cause only could be known, where relief only could come. From hence had proceeded all their pardons, their conquests, and possessions. But for the ark and the mercy-seat above, its propitiatory covering, Israel had been a lost people, and long had perished in want or conflict. No such seat of grace and habitation of mercy in Ai. The God of glory was still in the sanctuary of His people, though an accursed thing was in the camp. And where but to God in Christ, the true ark of the covenant and token of His gracious presence, can the afflicted, the oppressed, or the convicted go? This is their peculiar privilege, their constant need, and their never-failing resource. The pleadings of Joshua are a fine specimen and example of a true supplicatory spirit. It was before the ark, that grand and expressive type of Christ. Nothing in the worship of the spiritual sanctuary, no act of prayer or praise, no penitential pleadings or humiliations, can be acceptable, but as offered in the name, and through the mediation, of our Divine and glorious peace-maker, the Lord Jesus. Though the fears and apprehensions of unbelief mingle some infirmity with the pleadings of this great intercessor for Israel, yet there is impressive beauty and strength in his expressions, but in none so much as those which discover a mind tenderly affected for the glory of God, the honour of His name, and the prevalence

of His truth. "What wilt Thou do unto Thy great name?" Oh! this was the grand point, the highest consideration, and beyond which pleading could not go. This failing, no other could avail. And still here is all the force of pleading, as from it all the cause of prevailing. This name, with all its glory and honour, is in Christ known to the Church and published to the world, a name ever dear to God, and dearer than a thousand worlds. This will prevail above all the distresses of the Church, all the triumphs of her enemies. Peace and pardon, and every blessing of providence, grace and glory, are insured to the believer, so that he who rests here can never perish or be conquered. (*W. Seaton.*) *Deep affliction:*—When Achilles heard of the death of Patroclus his grief was so great that he cast himself on the ground as one that could not be comforted.

> "With both his hands black dust he gathers now,
> Casts on his head and soils his comely brow,
> Foul ashes cling his perfumed tunic round,
> His noble form lies stretched upon the ground."

Here we have a grief similarly expressed, but more pathetic and noble. Joshua shows here again that he was a perfect leader. In all the affliction of the people he is afflicted. All the feeling of dismay in the camp is concentrated, as it were, in him. His great capacity for leadership gives him greater capacity for suffering. Thus is it always. He who is most interested in the cause of Christ, he whose heart is most enthusiastic, will be most cast down by defeat. The man whose soul is most sensitive to sin, most fully alive to the commandments of God and the demands of truth, has the keenest sensibility, and therefore suffers most in a region of rebellion. That is to say, the more real spiritual life there is in the soul, the more suffering must there be. The sorrow of Jesus is the deepest because the love of Jesus is the highest. Joshua's sorrow, it is very plain, was sincere and unfeigned. There was no acting here. And his grief was as unselfish as it was sincere. His chief sorrow is for the people. Their fate, their prospects, are his chief concern. Joshua's perplexity is very great. This indeed is the biggest element in his trouble, and two parallel questions manifest it—"What shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies?" (ver. 8), and "What wilt Thou do unto Thy great name?" (ver. 9). If things continue as they are, and lead to their natural issues, "What shall I say? What wilt Thou do?" I have a difficulty in regard to my words. I have a difficulty in regard to Thy ways. What shall I say? What conclusion am I to come to? What construction am I to put on this event? Joshua makes no allowance for defeat. The chances of the glorious game of war have no place in his reckoning. Joshua cannot reconcile this defeat, unimportant though it may seem to some, with three grand facts wherein lay his chief confidence. The fact of the Divine presence—"Is God with us after all?" he might ask. The fact of the Divine promise—"Has God indeed spoken?" The fact of the Divine power—"Is God able to give unbroken victory?" The sad fact of defeat seemed to go in the face of these other facts. But to Joshua these other facts were as patent as that over which he mourned; hence his consternation. He is dumbfounded. And surely this noble sorrow, this believing consternation of Joshua, should be a reproof to many. We believe that there are individuals and congregations who would be more perplexed and confounded by a spiritual victory than by a spiritual disaster. But Joshua had a second question, which is the expression of a still deeper cause of perplexity. His first question, "What shall I say?" rose from his faith in God. His second question, "What wilt Thou do unto Thy great name?" arose from his fidelity to God. Thus Joshua's second question becomes a powerful plea before God, commanding His attention and drawing forth a reply. And it is well to notice here for our encouragement in any spiritual emergency that in the very trouble of Joshua's soul there exists the germ of good hope. Joshua, just because he knows, feels, and owns his trouble before God, is every moment helping forward the solution of the difficulty. To know that we are beaten may be a bad thing in ordinary warfare; hence Napoleon's complaint against the British troops; but it is not so in the spiritual fight; rather is it essential to continued success. Let us imitate Joshua in his godly sorrow. But trouble came upon Israel as well as upon their leader. As a single grain of colouring matter will tinge gallons of water, so one sin will affect a whole people. Achan's transgression influenced for evil the whole of that nation. His little leaven leavened the whole lump. No man can confine the effects of any sin within the small compass of his own personal experi-

ence. Just as in the heart of a rich city a collection of squalid and filthy dens may spread disease and death in its finest mansions, so the wicked, wherever found, become centres of spiritual infection, and no soul near them is safe; hence, just as men wisely seek in self-defence to improve the physical conditions of the poorest dwellings, so should we, if for no other motive than the preservation of our own spiritual health, labour in all directions, and in every possible way, to improve and elevate the masses. And if this principle holds in the body politic, much more powerfully does it manifest itself in the body mystic, *i.e.*, the Church of the living God. Here the influence of sin is most acutely and quickly felt. Hence the constant care that should be manifested in casting out every particle of the leaven of sin. He who takes heed to his own heart and life, keeping them clean and pure in the sight of God, edifies the brethren, and is health and strength and joy to all the body of Christ. He who is careless and sinful, must, like Achan, be a troubler of the house of God. Yes, and he himself must be miserable. What joy had Achan in all his ill-gotten gains? The rust of gold, like some strong Satanic acid, ate into his soul, to his unspeakable torture. Every transgressor sooner or later will find, like Achan, that in every sin lies its own punishment, and therefore escape is impossible. And Achan's act had an evil influence upon the Canaanites as well as on himself and Israel. The effect of this defeat at Ai would be to harden their hearts, to make them persist in their rebellion. How often does the success of the wicked turn out their destruction. Applying these things to the work of the Lord in our days, we are reminded by the effect of Achan's sin on these Canaanites of the evil that is brought on the world through the unfaithfulness of professing Christians. We must remember that not only the honour of the Master and the prosperity of the Church are connected with our faithfulness, but also, to no inconsiderable extent, the spiritual state of the world around. Therefore let us take heed as we name the name of Christ to depart from all iniquity, and perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord. (*A. B. Mackay.*)

Vers. 10–15. **Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?**—*Get thee up*:—To trust God is manifestly our duty. We are commanded to put our trust in Him. Trust in God is also a crowning means of safety and prosperity. Exceedingly great and precious promises are made to confidence in God. Watch over and cherish your trust in God. Cherish it by the study of the promises of your God. Cherish it by intercourse with God; and make this trust in God strong by giving it plenty of work to do. The more you exercise this principle, the stronger will it become. Trust in God is a manifest duty. But there are other obligations. We are under obligations to personal exertion. To trust is one duty; to exert ourselves is another: and although some persons would think that these two things cannot work together, they not only can, but they do work together in the experience and in the life of every man who is really walking with his God. Joshua, as you know, was leading the people forward to the entire conquest of Canaan. God has shown Israel's captain marvellous deliverances, and, as is common in our own life, after these wonderful deliverances there comes a check. And so entirely does this prostrate him, that God his helper has to rebuke him, and say to him in the language of rebuke, "Get thee up: wherefore liest thou upon thy face?" Now, it strikes me that there are not a few who are in the position of Joshua. 1. In the first place, there is the doubter, depressed and paralysed by his doubts. I say to that man, "Get up—get thee up, and inquire—get thee up, and call upon God—get thee up and search the book of God—get thee up and think, and meditate—get thee up and converse with sober, intelligent, wise, kind-hearted, Christlike disciples." Follow out your beliefs, and speak of that which you know. Then deal with your doubts. Do not let these doubts tarry. Do not let them become normal and constitutional. Regard them as a something to be taken away from your heart if possible. 2. We might, also, address these words to those who have fainted under the struggles of life. The words of those who have fainted in the day of adversity are such words as these, "All things are against me." "I shall one day fall by the hand of mine enemy." "Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency." Well, under depressing thoughts like these, those who have become weary in the struggle of life sink into prostration; and we say to such, "Get thee up." Out of most troubles there is a present way of escape, and a future way out of them all. Your trouble may be poverty. Why conclude that God means you to be poor all your days? Get up, and look if there be a way out of that poverty. Your trouble may be bodily weakness and sickness. Why conclud-

that you are to be an invalid all your days? Get thee up, and look. See if there be a way of escape from this bodily infirmity. Out of many of our troubles there is, I say, a way of escape; but we require to get up, and to look for the way of escape. All that we require in such circumstances is strength to wait. The working together of the various events of life is of course a process. That very idea of working together involves a succession of effects and of results. The good must come. 3. Perhaps, too, there is that class of person known by the common name of backslider. It is a serious thing to go back. But the man who has gone back is not in a hopeless state. He ought not to despair. Thanks be to God, I can appeal to your hope. I can in the name of God say, "Return unto the Lord, and He will return to you." He will heal your backsliding; He will love you freely; He will be as the dew to you, and you shall revive as the corn and grow as the vine. Only, only, return to the Lord. 4. Those who are hindered and disheartened in their godly enterprises, as were many of the companions of Nehemiah, in connection with the work of rebuilding the city and rebuilding the temple. Now God sent Haggai to say to the people, in substance, just what He said to Joshua, "Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?"—for by His prophet God spake thus: "Is it time for you to dwell in ceiled houses while God's house lies waste?" "Get thee up: wherefore liest thou upon thy face?" Now, just see that self-prostration and inertness are wrong. For, in the first place, it is God who speaks to us thus: "Get thee up"; God, whose power is almighty; God, whose resources are unsearchable riches; God, who is ever working to keep us up, and to lift us up, and who, when He has helped us ten thousand times, has His hands stretched out to help us still; God, who proffers His interposition to the weak and to the needy. And He speaks, observe, to our will, and to our hearts. By the use of these words He is seeking to work confidence, resolution, and determination. "Get thee up." He is appealing to our hopes, that He may comfort us by hope. There is no evil for which there is no remedy. The position, therefore, of a man of God is not that of prostration. Even when he is confessing his sins, his position is not that of prostration. Prostration is not his posture. His right position is to stand up like a man before God. Oh! do not thus lie prostrate on your faces. Do not yield to your despondency and despair. I speak to you men of God, and I may say to you, "All is right. All is right in Heaven concerning you: and if there be things wrong down here, Heaven can set them right." It may be, too, that there is some accursed thing that is producing your present perplexities and your present difficulties. I know not what that accursed thing may be. Perhaps it is sinful trust in yourselves; perhaps it is undue reliance on your fellow-creatures; perhaps you have done wrong in endeavouring to obtain an instrumentality to assist you that is not holy, and that is not heaven-approved. What the accursed thing may be a little honest inquiry will soon discover. By the power of God, I say, get rid of it; but, even before you get rid of it, get up. You cannot see the accursed thing while you are thus spiritually prostrate. You cannot see what you ought to do while you are thus spiritually prostrate. Whatever may be the cause of your present difficulty and depression, it is your duty to get up, and stand before God upright as a man. (*S. Martin.*) *God's voice to the desponding*:—I. DESPONDENCY SOMETIMES OVERTAKES THE GREATEST MEN. 1. Examples: Jacob, Elijah, David, &c. 2. The causes of despondency are numerous: remorse, disappointment, forebodings, failure, &c. II. DESPONDENCY MUST BE STRUGGLED AGAINST: "Get thee up." 1. Regrets for the past are useless. What is done cannot be undone. 2. There is urgent work to do. Resolute, earnest activity is required. 3. Despondency exhausts strength and unfits for work. Despair unstrings nerves, relaxes muscles, prostrates energies. 4. Effort will shake off the oppressive load, and give fresh energy to your soul. (*Homilist.*) **Israel hath sinned, . . . stolen and dissembled.**—*The sinfulness of sin*:—I. THE SUCCESSIVE STAGES OF SIN. "When Achan longed, he ought to have resisted; when he planned, he ought to have stopped before taking; when he had taken, he should have cast it away instead of stealing; when he had stolen, he should have freely confessed it; and when it was buried he ought to have dug it up again." II. THE AGGRAVATED GUILT OF SIN. 1. It was a transgression of righteousness: "Israel hath sinned." 2. It was a transgression of the law of gratitude. Achan ignored the covenant altogether. 3. It was a transgression of God's word: "Which I commanded them." 4. It was the transgression of good faith. Under the specific condition of not touching the spoil, the victory had been granted, and Achan had "even taken of the cherem." 5. It was a transgression of honesty and truth: "They have stolen and dissembled also." 6. It was a transgression of Achan's own

conscience. Had he not felt it wrong to put the devoted things "among his own stuff," he would not have hidden them. III. THE WIDE-REACHING EVIL OF SIN. IV. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN SIN AND UNBELIEF. Achan had no real faith—1. In Divine omniscience. Had he really believed that God saw him, he could not have taken of the spoil. 2. In Divine punishment. Had he been convinced that he would have been "devoted," he would have resisted the temptation. 3. In the Divine Word. To disbelieve in the punishment was to disbelieve Him who had threatened to destroy. (*F. G. Marchant.*) *Secret sin:*—We have a mournful interest in sin. Three characteristics of sin are seen in Achan—1. Sin is secret; that is, from men, not from God. 2. Sin is gradual. Captivates the senses: "I saw." Captivates the desires: "I coveted." Captivates the soul: "I took." 3. Sin is the herald of a curse: "The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked." Note its effects. I. ON JOSHUA—THE LEADER. 1. Changed the hero into a coward. His heart became as water. 2. Changed the man of faith to a doubter (ver. 7). 3. This in spite of his Divine call and his great ability. So secret sin affects the leaders of the Church to-day. II. ON ISRAEL—THE CHURCH. 1. Changed victors into victims. They fled from before Ai. Sin is weakness as well as wickedness. Sin deters the progress of the Church. 2. This in spite of the Divine covenant. That covenant was to give the land to the true sons of Abraham—the faithful: "If ye be willing and obedient," &c. 3. This, too, in spite of previous victory at Jericho. They won at Jericho, for they were all sanctified. They failed at Ai, for there was sin in the camp. One secret sinner may ruin a Church's worth. III. ON ACHAN—THE SINNER. Did not sin gain for him much spoil? Yes—and more. He got gold and brave apparel, but he also got for his secret sin—1. Public shame. 2. Public punishment. Sad as are the effects on others, the secret sinner feels them most of all. The remedy is—1. Not inactive grief: "Wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?" (ver. 10). 2. Active search for hidden sin (ver. 13). 3. Entire sanctification of all (ver. 13). (*James Dunk.*) *Secret sin discovered:*—Sin as a rule is committed under a false and pernicious impression, namely—(1) That it will never be known, or (2) if found out, in some way punishment will be avoided. If sinners did not deceive themselves on these points there would not be half the sin in the world there is. I. THERE IS AND CAN BE NO SECRET THING IN GOD'S UNIVERSE. Every sin, though no human eye or ear takes cognisance of it, is seen as soon as conceived by the all-seeing eye. That sin a secret when high Heaven knows it all! II. THERE IS IN SIN ITSELF THE ELEMENT OF EXPOSURE AND RETRIBUTION. Sin, like every other natural and moral force, works out certain results, physical, spiritual, and moral, and those results are not under man's control; they are the developments of law. The transgressor is impotent. He cannot stay the Almighty Hand, which, by means of the law of cause and effect, has its firm grip upon him. He is no longer master of himself, much less of his secret. And a thousand influences are working upon him and closing in upon him, all tending to disclosure and final retribution. III. ALL THE LAWS OF GOD'S UNIVERSE ARE PUT IN REQUISITION TO EXPOSE SIN AND BRING IT IN DUE TIME TO PUNISHMENT. 1. His physical laws. They even cry out against sin, as in the case of the inebriate, the glutton, the adulterer, &c. The heavens and the earth conspire to track and fasten guilt upon the murderer. 2. His moral law. Under its flashes and thunder peals many a guilty soul has quaked and been driven to confession or suicide. Conscience, echoing God's law, makes cowards of sinners; makes life an insupportable burden, drives them from home and makes them wanderers on the earth, as Cain was. 3. His providential law. A thousand agencies and forces are set to work to expose and punish transgression as soon as it is committed. Earth, air and water, science, art, and human law, all furnish evidence to point out and convict the criminal and bring him to judgment. (*J. M. Sherwood, D.D.*) *The punishment of sin:*—1. How necessary to Christian success is the presence of God. 2. When that presence is withheld, there is generally a cause. 3. When the presence of God is withheld, the Christian should be humbled and make inquiry before God. 4. Sin is the cause of the Divine displeasure, and must be searched out. 5. Mark the progress of sin. He who parleys with sin is half-way towards embracing it. 6. Behold the fatal termination of sin. (*J. G. Breay, B.A.*) *Sin a reproach and hindrance:*—Sin, that accursed thing which God hates is a hindrance and a reproach to any people, viewed either as a nation or as individuals. I. LET US LOOK AT THE SIN OF THE JEWS, AS A NATION, IN PERSISTING TO DESPISE AND REJECT JESUS OF NAZARETH. Now, what a shame and reproach are the Jews exposed to for their sin in rejecting Christ, the anointed of God! From what rich blessings

also are they excluded in consequence of their not admitting Jesus Christ to be the Son of God and the Saviour of the world! What an accursed thing, too, is the sin of idolatry to any nation! Those people who are ignorant of the one living and true God, through Jesus Christ whom He hath sent, and who are bowing down to stocks and to stones, are in the lowest state of misery and degradation. But further. Those nations which are professedly Christian nations are frequently seen to encourage some great evil, which operates against their prosperity, and which is a reproach to them. In no country which is called a Christian country should any laws be enacted which are likely to be detrimental to the religion of Christ. Now, whenever this is the case, it is a reproach to any people, and a great hindrance to their prosperity and comfort. II. We come now to A CLOSER APPLICATION OF OUR SUBJECT, AND TO CONSIDER IT IN REFERENCE TO INDIVIDUALS. You are all Christians by profession. But remember, "He is not a Jew which is one outwardly." Are ye living in the commission of gross sins and scandalous vices, while ye claim, in virtue of your baptism, to be the children of God, and heirs according to the promise? Ye are a reproach to the Lord's people, and a cause to them of much sorrow and anguish of heart. Remember that a day is coming when He, who is at present waiting, on thy true repentance, to be gracious unto thee and to save thee, will appear as thy terrible adversary to destroy thee. But further. May not sin, the accursed thing, in some degree be found among the real servants of God as well as among His enemies? How important, then, and necessary is it that believers should be continually aiming to mortify the remains of inbred corruption, and to be fortifying themselves against the inroads of sin by following after righteousness and holiness of life. (*W. Battersby, M.A.*) Neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you.—*God's part in the war*:—I. SUCCESS IN WAR IS A BLESSING WHICH IS GIVEN BY GOD. By this I mean that it does not depend only on the armaments which are fitted out, or the perfection of our war machinery, or the number of our troops, or the sagacity of our leaders, or the power of our enemy, whether we shall be successful in the end. It is clearly told us in Scripture —so clearly that there is no excuse for the man who disbelieves it—that God keeps the ultimate results of war entirely in His own hand. Perhaps there is no other department of human affairs in which Jehovah has so frequently in Scripture asserted His prerogative as that of war. "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong." And once more we find that Jehovah retains for Himself the name of Commander over all the armies of the earth. II. SO LONG AS WE CHERISH SIN, WE CANNOT EXPECT GOD TO GRANT US SUCCESS IN WAR. I do not mean to say that success is always given to the holiest—that victory is the guarantee of rectitude and defeat the sign of sin; for God ofttimes tries His people by afflictions, and permits the wicked for a time to prosper. We are not sufficient judges of these things. But the only ground on which we can well expect the blessing of success from God is, surely, that of walking uprightly before Him; and when we cherish sin wilfully and consciously within our breasts, neither this nor any other blessing can we expect Jehovah to bestow upon us. It was the sin of one man in the camp. It is the same with us. For public and national sins we are indeed called to mourn this day. They form a long black roll. They are too many for enumeration. But we have also our private, our individual sins to mourn. They are concerned in our disasters. There has been a vainglorious boasting—a self-sufficient confidence in the prowess of our soldiers, and the irresistible force of our arms, as if we could not fail. We thought we were presenting to the world an unequalled spectacle. We have not been relying, as a nation, upon the help and sufficiency of Jehovah. Until we come to a more fitting state of heart—till our self-confidence be less—till our recognition of Jehovah be more—till we feel that we are less than nothing and vanity—till we feel that all our sufficiency is of God—we can by no means look that the Omnipotent should scatter our foes before us and humble them in the dust. (*J. E. Cumming, D.D.*) *Covetousness in the Church*:—I. A HEINOUS TRANSGRESSION WAS COMMITTED. Some pursue the acquisition of wealth with quiet plodding industry, not appearing to be the subjects of much excitement, but associating greediness with wariness and caution, never permitting themselves to swerve from the contemplation of the end, or the employment of the means for attaining to it. Others, again, in the emphatic language of Scripture, have "hasted to be rich." The appetite has been suddenly and uncontrollably kindled, either by a combination of internal suggestions or by the fatal facilities and opportunities which of late have been so signally multiplied. It must, however, here be remembered that there are other forms of covetousness besides that which consists in the craving and the pursuit of

wealth. The love of fame, the love of power, and the love of sensual pleasure—all these constitute covetousness; and such covetousness also we conceive to have intruded itself much into the hearts of the professing people of God. II. A MOURNFUL CONSEQUENCE WAS INCURRED. 1. Observe the consequence, as relating to the individual himself. God, by virtue of His essential omniscience, was aware of the perpetration of the sin; notwithstanding its concealment He saw it done, and He instantly arranged a series of events, by which, in the most impressive manner, there might be immediate detection, and then condign and adequate punishment. There is nothing but what is naked and manifest before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do; and as God knows the sin, so also God punishes the sin. Sometimes He punishes covetousness, when it is remarkably revolting in its operations, by judgments similar to the one which is recorded here—the abrupt termination of life, either by the hands of men or by judgments from His own power, which cannot be misapprehended or mistaken. Or, frequently, God punishes covetousness by mental anxiety and dissatisfaction; by the loss of that for which they have craved, so that it becomes to them as though it had never been; by social disgrace, contempt and dishonour; by the ruin of bodily and intellectual health, and by an abandonment to remorse and despair. Always God punishes covetousness, when it constitutes and is cherished to the last as a master passion, by an exclusion from His favour, and from the abodes of His celestial glory. Ye professing Christians see to it that, under the cloak of your religion, you hide nothing and cherish nothing of a spirit which is deadly wherever it is indulged. And let us all endeavour, with constant anxiety, to remember that "God will not be mocked"; and that "it is a fearful thing" to fall into His hands. 2. Again, we are also to trace the consequences, as relating to the community to which the individual belonged. For important reasons, the welfare of the whole people of Israel was affected by the individual transgression. You will now be prepared for the statement we have simply to advance—that the prosperity of the Christian Church has been much checked, and that its progress has been grievously retarded, by the covetousness and by the worldly conformity of those who have professed to be connected with it. III. A MOMENTOUS DUTY WAS REQUIRED. It was that the people should "put away the accursed thing" from them. 1. There is comprehended here uncompromising separation from all that is polluted and pernicious. 2. There must also be devoted engagement in direct effort for the advancement of the Divine glory. There ought to be, throughout the whole of the Christian Church, one spirit of devoted, unwearied, and incessant activity in the proclamation of the unsearchable riches of Christ. And, in connection with personal labour, there must be pecuniary contribution. The property which has been vouchsafed to man as a stewardship is to be taken away from the service of mammon, and devoted to the service of the Saviour, is to be taken away from the service of Satan and devoted to the service of God, and of souls, and of salvation. There must also be prayerfulness—incessant and persevering prayerfulness—prayer involving matters as wide as the universe can supply; that our own souls may be spiritually established, and may prosper; that the souls of our fellow-saints may be aroused, revived, and preserved. (*James Parsons.*)

Vers. 16–19. Achan . . . was taken.—*Achan's sin:*—1. Look at it in itself. It was sacrilege—a robbing God of what He had directed to be devoted to His glory and appropriated to the use of His sanctuary. 2. View it in its circumstances. It was committed immediately after the offender, together with the rest of the people of Israel, had solemnly renewed their dedication to God in the ordinances of circumcision and the Passover, and after the most signal display of almighty power; and it was committed when God had declared that the person who should be found guilty of such a sin should be accursed. 3. Look, too, at Achan's sin in its effects. In consequence of it, God had withdrawn His favour and His help from His people; they had sustained a humiliating defeat, in which six-and-thirty of their number had been slain; and had the sin not been punished, it would have procured the destruction of the whole nation. (*W. Cardall, B.A.*) *Achan's trespass:*—A vessel in full sail scuds merrily over the waves. Everything betokens a successful and delightful voyage. The log has just been taken, marking an extraordinary run. The passengers are in the highest spirits, anticipating an early close of the voyage. Suddenly a shock is felt, and terror is seen on every face. The ship has struck on a rock. Not only is progress arrested, but it will be a mercy for crew and passengers if they can escape with their lives. Not often so violently, but often as really, progress is arrested in many a good enterprise that seemed to be prospering

to a wish. There may be no shock, but there is a stoppage of movement. The vital force that seemed to be carrying it on towards the desired consummation declines, and the work hangs fire. In all such cases we naturally wonder what can be the cause. And very often our explanation is wide of the mark. In religious enterprises we are apt to fall back on the sovereignty and inscrutability of God. "He moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform." It seems good to Him, for unknown purposes of His own, to subject us to disappointment and trial. We do not impugn either His wisdom or His goodness; all is for the best. But, for the most part, we fail to detect the real reason. That the fault should lie with ourselves is the last thing we think of. We search for it in every direction rather than at home. It was an unexpected obstacle of this kind that Joshua now encountered in his next step towards possessing the land. Hitherto Joshua had been eminently successful, and his people too. Not a hitch had occurred in all the arrangements. The capture of Jericho had been an unqualified triumph. It seemed as if the people of Ai could hardly fail to be paralysed by its fate. The men of Israel were not prepared for a vigorous onslaught, and when it came thus unexpectedly they were taken aback and fled in confusion. As the men of Ai pursued them down the pass, they had no power to rally or retrieve the battle; the rout was complete, some of the men were killed, while consternation was carried into the host, and their whole enterprise seemed doomed to failure. And now for the first time Joshua appears in a somewhat humiliating light. He is not one of the men that never make a blunder. He rends his clothes, falls on his face with the elders before the ark of the Lord till even, and puts dust upon his head. There is something too abject in this prostration. And when he speaks to God, it is in the tone of complaint and in the language of unbelief. Like Peter on the waters, and like so many of ourselves, he begins to sink when the wind is contrary, and his cry is the querulous wail of a frightened child! After all he is but flesh and blood. Now it is God's turn to speak. "Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?" Why do you turn on Me as if I had suddenly changed, and become forgetful of My promise? Then comes the true explanation—"Israel hath sinned." Might you not have divined that this was the real cause of your trouble? Is not sin directly or indirectly the cause of all trouble? What a curse that sin is, in ways and forms, too, which we do not suspect! And yet we are usually so very careless about it. How little pains we take to ascertain its presence, or to drive it away from among us! How little tenderness of conscience we show, how little burning desire to be kept from the accursed thing! And when we turn to our opponents and see sin in them, instead of being grieved, we fall on them savagely to upbraid them, and we hold them up to open scorn. How little we think, if they are guilty, that their sin has intercepted the favour of God, and involved not them only, but probably the whole community in trouble! How unsatisfactory to God must seem the bearing even of the best of us in reference to sin! The peculiar covenant relation in which Israel stood to God caused a method to be fallen on for detecting their sin that is not available for us. The whole people were to be assembled next morning, and inquiry was to be made for the delinquent in God's way, and when the individual was found condign punishment was to be inflicted. The tribe is taken, the family is taken, but that is not all; the household that God shall take shall come "man by man." It is that individualising of us that we dread; it is when it comes to that, that "conscience makes cowards of us all." But before passing on to the result of the scrutiny, we find ourselves face to face with a difficult question. If, as is here intimated, it was one man that sinned, why should the whole nation have been dealt with as guilty? We are to remember that practically the principle of solidarity was fully admitted in Joshua's time among his people. The sense of injustice and hardship to which it might give rise among us did not exist. Men recognised it as a law of wide influence in human affairs, to which they were bound to defer. Let us think of Achan's temptation. A large amount of valuable property fell into the hands of the Israelites at Jericho. By a rigorous law, all was devoted to the service of God. Now a covetous man like Achan might find many plausible reasons for evading this law. "What I take to myself (he might say) will never be missed. Nobody will suffer a whit by what I do—it cannot be very wrong." Now the great lesson taught very solemnly and impressively to the whole nation was, that this was just awfully wrong. The moral benefit which the nation ultimately got from the transaction was, that this kind of sophistry, this flattering unction which leads so many persons ultimately to destruction, was exploded and blown to shivers. That sin is to be held sinful only when it hurts your fellow-creatures, and especially the poor

among your fellow-creatures, is a very common impression, but surely it is a delusion of the devil. That it has such effects may be a gross aggravation of the wickedness, but it is not the heart and core of it. And how can you know that it will not hurt others? Not hurt your fellow-countrymen, Achan? Why, that secret sin of yours has caused the death of thirty-six men and a humiliating defeat of the troops before Ai. More than that, it has separated between the nation and God. Many say, when they tell a lie, it was not a malignant lie; it was a lie told to screen some one, not to expose him, therefore it was harmless. But you cannot trace the consequences of that lie, any more than Achan could trace the consequences of his theft, otherwise you would not dare to make that excuse. Is there safety for man or woman except in the most rigid regard to right and truth, even in the smallest portions of them with which they have to do? Is there not something utterly fearful in the propagating power of sin, and in its way of involving others, who are perfectly innocent, in its awful doom? Happy they who from their earliest years have had a salutary dread of it, and of its infinite ramifications of misery and woe! (*W. G. Blaikie, D.D.*) *A great crime*:—I. The crime of Achan was marked by DISOBEDIENCE. And the remembrance of the solemn covenant between God and His people rendered the disobedience very aggravated. The act of Achan was a glaring breach of its conditions. II. It was also an act of THEFT, a breach of the eighth commandment. There was, on the part of Achan, a definite and deliberate breach of trust; as much so as if the crime had been embezzlement or forgery. And it is very plain that this act was deliberately planned and carried out. Achan's action was not that of a man suddenly overcome by temptation. His act was most deliberate. It was also inexcusable. There was no pressing want or demand upon him to coerce right principle. III. DECEIT also characterised Achan's conduct. So is it always. Lying and stealing are twin brothers, inseparable. The words "committed a trespass" might be more literally translated, "deceived a deceit." The whole transaction occurred under cover of a cloud of guile. He not only stole, but also tried hard to cover his offence with craft. IV. Achan's conduct also revealed UNBROTHERLINESS. He wished in an underhand way to get the better of his brethren, and that was bad enough; it showed how utterly selfish he was. But he had also been warned that such conduct would be visited not only on the perpetrator himself, but on all the people (chap. vi. 18). Accordingly his act was unbrotherly and unpatriotic. The real enemy of God's people is not opposing strength but inner corruption; not the quibbles of the infidel but the carelessness of the Christian. Achan's wedge of gold was a more formidable weapon against Israel than all the swords of the aliens. The grand lessons here taught are, that while the holy are invincible, the defiled must be defeated; and "He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house." V. Still further, Achan's conduct revealed INGRATITUDE. And this was all the more sad, because Jehovah was no hard master, eager to gather all to Himself and leave His servants as little as possible. Each of them will have plenty in good time. There is sufficient for each and all, and for their children after them. Surely He may well demand the firstfruits as His due. VI. Achan's deed betokened IMPIETY. It was the act of a godless heart. Could Achan have believed that God spoke true, when He warned the army of the evil that would come upon them if they disobeyed His command? Nay, he did not believe the Divine word. Neither did he believe in the Divine knowledge. Whom did Achan conceive the God of Israel to be? One like the blind and deaf deities of Canaan—a god who could not see and understand. His act was an invasion of God's rights before His very face; the alienation of His property under His very eyes; the devoting to private use that which He had devoted to His glory, and therefore it amounted to daring and impudent sacrilege. Is such a sin as Achan's extinct? Is there no unjust getting in these days? no "getting of treasures by a lying tongue"? Is there no undue grasping in these days? Has God no claim on any portion of what we possess? (*A. B. Mackay.*) *Found out*:—One man spoiled the unity, spoiled the success. It is put in plain English: for the sin of one man the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and they all suffered. For that unity, that solidarity, is a reality far more than we think. God counts a great deal upon it. If one member suffer, the whole body suffers. If there is health, there is general health. If there is sickness, we are all enfeebled and hurt by that sickness. It is somewhat like what takes place in connection with our electric telegraph system. Messages and communications are flying to and fro, say, between the different parts of an army in a foreign country engaged in a foreign campaign, one being in complete accord and close communication

with the other, when suddenly there is a breakdown. Suddenly the generals in each host cease to be able to communicate with each other. United movement is impossible: united counsel is impossible. Why? Because, at some one place the enemy, by means of a spy, has tapped the wire; and all this communication of theirs is being turned not for them, but against them. At some place the wire is tapped and the communication is taken off and is used by the enemy. So with Israel. At one point the tide of the Spirit's power that was circulating through them all was deflected. By one unfaithful man the whole tide of God's energy was shed helplessly down to the earth. The problem on that day was this. There was one man who had broken the chain. A leakage was taking place at one point, at one particular man, an ordinary man, a man who but for his sin would never have been heard of in the world. Oh, see how staring, glaring, conspicuous a man becomes by sin; not by cleverness, not by intellectuality, not by wealth, not by culture, not by rank, not by wearing clothes, and taking positions, but by this dirty thing—sin. Sin makes a man conspicuous who otherwise, as I have said, would not have been heard of—an ordinary man in the ranks of men. There is that missing link; there is that break; there is that leakage; there is that sinner. The problem is, how to find him out—how to have the damage repaired, how to have that man detected, and either put right or put out. And the problem is intensified thus. The man knows what he has done, and the man will not tell. We have the same thing still. This accursed thing is in us, namely, that our heart shall depart from the living God; our heart shall forget its purpose; our heart shall turn aside to sin, and outwardly we shall brazen it out with our very Leader and defy Him, and deny so far as we are concerned, that we are responsible—that the blame lies at our door. There was no confession. The Lord was not helped in the least. He had to take judgment in hand. Joshua was nonplussed; and if God Himself had not come, Israel's history as a successful people would have come to a close at this very point. We talk in our homely proverb of the difficulty, the impossibility, of finding a needle in a haystack. That familiar phrase receives a moral illustration here. What God has to do is to find out the one sinner among these assembled thousands, when he is keeping as dark as the grave. God could have come and simply taken that unclean thing, Achan. He could have taken him "neck and crop" without all this process. God could have gone straight to him, and put His hand upon his shoulder, and hurled him out into the outer darkness at once. Why take all this time—tribe by tribe, family by family, man by man? Surely that was mercy. That was in Achan's interest. He gave the poor, infatuated fool time, space, place, room to repent; and as he saw Nemesis evidently on his track he had time to cast himself down before Joshua, and to exclaim, "Stop! I confess! I am the man." Had he done so, this story, I am convinced, would have been one of the brightest stories of mercy in God's book, instead of one of its darkest, almost without a ray of light. Achan was taken. That same God is the God of the New Testament Church. I do not know how it may be with you: but this is the kind of preaching I was brought up under, and I have seen no reason to turn from it—a God of inflexible righteousness and holiness, who will not allow sin to go unpunished. Now do not stand up blatantly and ask whether I have ever heard of the Cross and the New Testament. I have been to the Cross. This story is intensified by the Cross. At the Cross we behold at once the goodness and the severity of God. At the Cross we learn the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the dazzling, blinding holiness of God, as well as the mercy that is intershot through all. Sin is no metaphysical abstraction. It is not a mere arrangement of the letters of the alphabet. It is not a mere thing of theology or of philosophy. It is a deep, dark, abominable thing found in the hearts of men; and if God spared not the angels that sinned, how shall He spare us? No, it was no exaggeration. It was no "trouble for nothing." It was no mere cry. God was justified. There was a stone in the machine, and God found out the stone and took it away; and then the wheels ceased to grate and jar and move heavily. There is a stone in the machine yet, in the moral machinery of God's Church and of God's world. I may be that stone, and I may be concealing what I am—concealing it behind the profession of the ministry, concealing it behind preaching to you on this very subject. You may be concealing it behind the office of the elder. You may be concealing it behind a great anxiety to keep the table of the Lord and the communion roll pure; and I say that this is needful, and it is a good sign and a good thing that the Church should conserve and be anxious about her purity before God and man; and yet it may be part of the dress that we put on, to look as

Achan looked. For while the judgment processes were going on Achan, very likely, held up his head and looked round. "It is not I, at any rate"; and the nearer it came the more brazen he looked; "It is not I." So our very scrupulosity and care in connection with God's house and book and day may belong to the Pharisee within us, the Achan, the hypocrite. God Almighty alone could have detected this man, and God Almighty Himself had to take the judgment work in hand. I am speaking to Achan here, and I want to let you know that you will get all you are working for. The day comes when the sweet gales of mercy no longer shall blow—when you will hear no more about cleansing blood—when there will be nothing but "a fearful looking for of judgment and of fiery indignation that shall devour the adversaries"—when your sin shall be proved on you, and in you, and to you, and before an assembled world, with no chance for ever of getting its curse and its power lifted away. It is coming. God will here lead us now to confession, or there to too late confession and doom beyond remedy. (*John McNeill.*) *Achan a representative man:*—There is nothing old in these words. Achan is "taken" every day. Achan is sure to be "taken." If we are practising the policy of Achan, the fate of Achan we can never avert. What a representative man is Achan! Does he not represent those, for example, who are continually taking great risks? What a life some men lead! But the mystery of it is that Achan represents also men who have no need to take risks. They have plenty; they have sweet homes. They need not go out of their own doors for a single pleasure. Yet they covet just a little more: it is only one acre to complete the estate. Achan committed a sin which is common to us all, in so far that he felt it extremely difficult to subordinate the personal to the communal. He might have said—and in so saying he would have talked good, round English—"What can a wedge of gold matter in all this great heap of wealth? What is the difference one Babylonish garment more or less? Who will be the worse for my taking it? Nobody need know. I want a relic of this event, I want a keepsake; this has been a very wonderful miracle, and I want to keep in my house some memorial of it; I could turn these things into good, moral uses: I could preach sermons upon them, I could derive lessons from them. It cannot make any difference where thousands of men are concerned if I take one wedge of gold, two hundred shekels of silver, and a goodly Babylonish garment—they are all but a handful, and who will miss them? In fact, there will be no reckoning; things in connection with a battle are done so tumultuously and so irregularly that none will ever think of looking up such a handful of spoil as I may seize." That is the exaggeration of individualism; that is the lie which man is always telling to himself. It is the falsehood which enables him to cheat the body politic: "What can it matter if I do not vote? There are thousands of people who want to vote, let them enjoy themselves, and I will take mine ease. What can it matter if I do not keep the laws of the company—the municipal or other company? The great majority of the neighbours will keep them, and as for any little infraction of them of which I may be guilty, it is mere pedantry to remark upon it. Who cares for the body politic—the body corporate?" We are being taught to respect that so-called abstraction; but the lesson is a very difficult one to learn. When shall we come to understand fully that there is a corporate humanity, a public virtue, a body politic, with its responsibilities, laws, duties—a great training-school in which individualism is subordinated to the commonwealth? Does not Achan represent those who create unnecessary mysteries in the course of Divine providence? It is the concealed man who could explain everything. It is the thief behind the screen who could relieve all our wonder, perplexity, and distress. We have to search him out by circumstantial evidence. If he would stand up and say, "Guilty!" he would relieve our minds of many a distressing thought even about the Divine government. We wonder why the people are delayed, why the battle goes the wrong way, why the heathen pursues the chosen man, and beats him down, and scorns his assaults. We speak of God's mysterious way. It is a mistake on our part. The silent man, skulking behind the arras, could explain the whole affair, and relieve Divine providence of many a wonder which grows quickly into suspicion or distrust. Look at the case in one or two remarkable aspects. 1. Consider Achan, for example, as a solitary sinner. He was the only man in the host who had disobeyed the orders that were given. "Why arrest a whole army on account of one traitor? Let the host go on." So man would say. God will not have it so. He does not measure by our scale. One sin is a thousand. 2. Think of Achan as a detected sinner. For a time there was no prospect of the man being found out. But God has methods of sifting which

we do not know of. 3. Then look at Achan as a confessing sinner. He did confess his sin, but not until he was discovered. And the confession was as selfish as the sin. 4. The picture of Achan as a punished sinner is appalling. Who punished the sinful man? The answer to that inquiry is given in ver. 25, and is full of saddest yet noblest meaning. Who punished the thief? "All Israel stoned him with stones"—not one infuriated man, not one particularly interested individual, but "all Israel." The punishment is social. It is the universe that digs hell—the all rising against the one. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) **My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord.**—*Kindness to the sinner:*—There was infinite kindness in that word "my son." It reminds us of that other Joshua, the Jesus of the New Testament, so tender to sinners, so full of love even for those who had been steeped in guilt. It brings before us the great High Priest, who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, seeing He was in all things tempted like as we are, yet without sin. A harsh word from Joshua might have set Achan in a defiant attitude, and drawn from him a denial that he had done anything amiss. How often do we see this! A child or a servant has done wrong; you are angry, you speak harshly, you get a flat denial. Or if the thing cannot be denied, you get only a sullen acknowledgment, which takes away all possibility of good arising out of the occurrence, and embitters the relation of the parties to each other. But not only did Joshua speak kindly to Achan, he confronted him with God, and called on him to think how He was concerned in this matter. "Give glory to the Lord God of Israel." Vindicate Him from the charge which I and others have virtually been bringing against Him, of proving forgetful of His covenant. Clear Him of all blame, declare His glory, declare that He is unsullied in His perfections, and show that He has had good cause to leave us to the mercy of our enemies. No man as yet knew what Achan had done. He might have been guilty of some act of idolatry, or of some unhallowed sensuality like that which had lately taken place at Baal-peor; in order that the transaction might carry its lesson it was necessary that the precise offence should be known. Joshua's kindly address and his solemn appeal to Achan to clear the character of God had the desired effect. (*W. G. Blaikie, D.D.*) *Confession of sin to God:*—God's omniscience should indeed make us ashamed to commit sin, but it should embolden us to confess it. We can tell our secrets to a friend that does not know them; how much more should we do it to Him that knows them already? God's knowledge outruns our confessions and anticipates what we have to say. As our Saviour speaks concerning prayer, "Your heavenly Father knows what you have need of before you ask," so I may say of confession, your heavenly Father knows what secret sins you have committed before you confess. But still He commands this duty of us; and that not to know our sins but to see our ingenuity. Adam, when he hid himself, to the impiety of his sin added the absurdity of a concealment. Our declaring of our sins to God who knows them without being beholden to our relation; it is like opening a window to receive the light which would shine in through it howsoever. Now there is no duty by which we give God the glory of His omniscience so much as by a free confession of our secret iniquities. Joshua says to Achan, "My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto Him." (*R. South.*)

Vers. 20, 21. **Achan answered . . . I coveted and took.**—*The eye, the heart, and the hand:*—I. THE EYE AN OCCASION OF SIN. We will suppose that Achan came into contact with this Babylonish garment in the course of his duty. He could not help seeing it, and therefore there was no harm in seeing it; in the simple contact of this garment with his eye, and of this silver and gold with his eye, there could be no wrong; this was a permission of Divine Providence. The sin was in the looking at it. He saw; and instead of turning his eye away from the temptation, he continued to look, and he looked until he coveted, and he coveted until he took. And we will suppose that you cannot help seeing things which suggest the thought of doing wrong, and which excite the desire to do wrong; but you can help fixing your eyes upon them, and keeping your eyes intent upon them. II. MARK THE PROGRESS OF SIN. It was an evil thing to continue looking; it was a greater evil to desire to take. The desire springing up, what did Achan with respect to it? Instead of trying to quench it, he fed it. He let imagination fly and work, and, under the influence of that imagination, and the thinking connected with that imagination, the desire to possess this garment, and to lay hold of this silver and gold, became in his heart exceedingly strong, and mastered him. Under the power of that desire he stretched forth his hand and took. Just see here the progress of the sin—I saw, I coveted, I

took; I first took that which was doomed to be destroyed, and then I took that which was devoted to the service of my God. III. LOOK AT THE DECEITFULNESS OF SIN. When Achan saw, and coveted, and took, the taking promised him great things. There is nothing in the universe so deceitful and so treacherous as doing wrong. Doing wrong always promises some good result, and doing wrong has never yet realised it, nor ever can. IV. LOOK AT THE COWARDICE OF THE TRANSGRESSOR. He hid these things. He first put them among his furniture. I dare say he thought that there would be no notice taken of it. Then, when a stir is made about the matter, and the lot begins to be used, what did he? Instead of having the courage and manliness to remove suspicion from his fellows, and to say, "I am the sinner," he hides in the earth, in the midst of his tent, the treasures and the garment which he has taken. This seems to be a general fact in connection with sin: "The wicked fleeth when no man pursueth, but the righteous are bold as a lion." V. LOOK AT THE FOLLY AND THE MADNESS OF PERSISTING IN TRANSGRESSION. The wages of sin, what are they? You see this illustrated here. "The wages of sin is death." Achan, instead of gaining anything by this transgression, lost all. He lost not only the spoil he had taken, but he lost even life itself. Now this is God's arrangement, that he whose transgressions are not pardoned shall die, and shall die a second death. Tell me, then, what is a man profited if he gain the world, and die that second death? (*S. Martin.*) *Achanism; or, self-seeking a hindrance to the victories of Christianity*:—I. This principle applies to THE EFFORTS OF MEN TO PROMOTE THEIR OWN INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIANITY. It is common to hear Christians mourning their spiritual barrenness; regretting their little progress in the great work of self-discipline and personal sanctification. They refer the cause sometimes to the circumstances in which they are placed, and sometimes to the profitless ministry which they attend, whereas there is some Achan within—some unholy principle or passion that is neutralising every effort, and rendering the spirit powerless to strike one conquering blow. II. This principle applies to THE EFFORTS WHICH INDIVIDUAL CHURCHES MAKE TO PROMOTE CHRISTIANITY IN THEIR OWN NEIGHBOURHOOD. Some sweeping system of discipline must come before your efforts to evangelise will be of much avail. The tares must be plucked from the wheat. III. This principle applies to THE EFFORTS WHICH THE GENERAL CHURCH IS EMPLOYING TO PROMOTE CHRISTIANITY THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. The self-seeking spirit hinders the spread of the Gospel. 1. By preventing that agency which is indispensable for the purpose. Self-sacrifice. 2. By prompting that agency which must necessarily neutralise its aim. Priestcraft. Slavery. War. (*Homilist.*) *Achan*:—I. THE GRADUAL PROGRESS OF SIN. II. THE DECEITFUL NATURE OF SIN (Job xx. 12–15; Hab. ii. 11). III. THE CERTAIN DETECTION OF SIN. IV. THE AWFUL PENALTY OF SIN. V. THE ONLY WAY OF FORGIVENESS OF SIN. VI. THE UNCERTAINTY OF A LATER REPENTANCE. (*T. Webster, B.D.*) *Sin's progress*:—I. THE GLANCE: "I saw." II. THE GREED: "I coveted." III. THE GUILT: "I took." (*Thomas Kelly.*) *Achan's sin*:—I. THE FASCINATION: "Babylonish garment." II. THE FEELING: "I coveted." III. THE FELONY: "I took." IV. THE FEAR: "I hid them." V. THE FATE: "Israel stoned him." (*Ibid.*) *Achan and his sin*:—I. THE TEMPTING SIGHT: "A goodly Babylonish garment," &c. II. THE COVETOUS HEART: "I coveted them." III. THE GRASPING HAND: "Took them." IV. THE CRAFTY ACTION: "Hid." V. THE JUDICIAL SEARCH: "Joshua sent," &c. VI. THE LAWFUL SEIZURE: "They took them." VII. THE RELIGIOUS CEREMONY: "Laid them out before the Lord." VIII. THE MERITED RETRIBUTION: "Stoned him." IX. THE ADMONITORY MEMORIAL: "Raised over him a great heap of stones." X. THE APPEASED AVENGER: "So the Lord turned," &c. (*J. Henry Burn, B.D.*) *Achan's sin*:—God, who looks deeply into the hidden springs of human conduct, is careful to lay a special emphasis upon the more subtle evil of covetousness. It deserves attention that, along with murder, theft and lying, it has one entire commandment to itself. Drunkenness, violence, sensuality, luxurious living, corruption and bribery are doubtless making havoc with reputations, with human life and with immortal souls. But who shall say how often these open vices draw their inspiration or the means of gratification from "the love of money, which is," in very deed, "a root of all evil"? Many of the more violent sins are like fire in dry stubble—they burn out rapidly. But avarice is like those fish which can best thrive in Arctic seas—it flourishes in the chilly blood of old age. I. In turning our attention to the dealings of God with Israel concerning Achan's transgression let us briefly REVIEW THE FACTS. II. These dealings of God with Achan's family and with Israel because of one man's sin bring before us in a startling shape that great mystery—FELLOWSHIP IN GUILT AND IN

SUFFERING. Bishop Butler states a fact of daily experience when, in his irrefutable reply to objections against the mediation of Christ ("Analogy" pt. ii. ch. v.), he reminds us that nearly the whole of what we enjoy or suffer comes to us through our relation to other men. Every thinking man can see for himself that the conduct of parents shapes the destiny of their children. Drunkenness, sensuality and gluttony stamp themselves upon the offspring that is yet unborn. The more obvious operations of the law are visible to our feeble eyes. How much farther it extends is known only to God or as He reveals it to us. When the attempt is made to break the force of this analogy by saying, "It is all natural," that same sagacious thinker reminds us that "natural" means are appointed by Him who is the Author of nature. So it appears that, explain the facts as we may, deny them if we dare, we cannot get rid of the principle so long as we hold to a belief in an almighty Creator. III. From this discussion, notwithstanding our imperfect apprehension of its great theme, CERTAIN CONCLUSIONS SEEM TO FOLLOW WHICH ARE OF IMMENSE PRACTICAL IMPORTANCE. 1. How vain to hope for escape from punishment so long as sin remains unrepented of! 2. A wise regard to our own happiness will make us deeply interested in the welfare of our neighbour. God holds us accountable in this regard to an extent that many seem not to dream of. 3. It especially becomes parents to consider the influence which, in the nature of things, they must exert over the destiny of their children. Not miserable Achan only, but far better men, as Noah, Lot, Eli, and David, are sad examples of this. "The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked, but He blesseth the habitation of the just." 4. Among other duties it is incumbent upon such parents to consider well what place shall be made in their plans for "goodly" garments and for shekels of gold and silver. There may be, there often is, a place for such things, but it becomes us to consider the text upon which our Lord preached that wonderful sermon, the parable of the rich fool: "Take heed and beware of covetousness," &c. (*W. E. Boggs, D.D.*) *Achan's crime, confession, and punishment:*—In the progress of the evil, temptation entered by the eye, that chief inlet of corruption to the heart. He might be characterised by all that was evil: an evil eye, an evil heart, and an evil hand. Correct imitator of the first transgressor! David's distress and dishonour originated in the same course; and so did the covetousness of Ahab, who could not see Naboth's vineyard without conceiving the purpose of making it his own. Thus the eye, exquisitely nice in construction, beautiful in form, and precious in use, formed too for purposes of purity and pleasure, is pressed into the service of sin, and has opened to the heart, that deep and rising fountain of evil, that spring of moral corruption, endless forms of sin and allurement. In the advance of sin the temptation laid hold of his affections, those strong ties of inward life, and too frequent controllers of outward action. The first conceptions of evil, and its last impressions, are in the heart: the eye is but as a servant in its employ. When I saw, &c., then I coveted them. The only thing that remained was to make them his own, for which we may conceive many palliating considerations were admitted, matured by unbelief. Oh! to what cruelties and outrage have forbidden desires, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, impelled on many who, in love of power, wealth, and pleasure, have not only laid hands on what God has prohibited, but, with property, taken away the very lives of its owners! "I took them." The hand, as the eye, now became the servant of the heart to perfect its evil wishes. Ah! little did he consider that the whole progress of this action was marked with a curse—the sight, the desire, and the act of sin, and that therein he had even appropriated a curse from which he would never be able to free himself. "And, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent." What perplexities did these riches bring! a thousand embarrassments felt, before a place could be found for their deposit!—at last, his tent; not among the things seen, nor were they deemed safe in the privacy of his most concealed possessions, but, as though dead to his heart, and never again to see the light, he gave them burial beneath his tent! Neither friend, nor wife, nor children, could be entrusted with the secret. Oh! that any should transact what fear or shame induces them to conceal from the observation of others, and even sometimes what they could not endure their nearest friends should know! But what can all avail when men cannot hide themselves, or any of their actions, from the eye of infinite purity, which sees into every dark recess of infidelity and corruption. In this instance of confession one melancholy reflection arises—it was out of the order of mercy as to this life, and therefore unavailing. Instead of preceding detection, it was after conviction, and but the desperate necessity of his case, wanting the ingenuousness which ever characterises the sincere

penitent as the hater of his own offence. Whatever his situation in the next world, it may be viewed as a faint picture of their ineffectual confessions and unavailing miseries who shall appear convicted and condemned at the bar of God. The awfulness of the sentence naturally throws our reflections upon the aggravations of the offence. "He that is taken with the accursed thing shall be burnt with fire, he and all that he hath." The reason assigned vindicates the severity of justice. "Because he hath transgressed the covenant of the Lord, and because he hath wrought folly in Israel." Achan acted against the mightiest displays of vengeance and love, the obligations of favours received, and the awful severities of justice executed upon idolaters. To all the wonders of providence and grace displayed through many years, the interposition of power so recently experienced in the destruction of Jericho, added new claims of obedience. The covenant relation in which he stood to God as one of His professing people, and the instructions of revelation with which he was favoured, gave an aggravation to his offence, beyond whatever could characterise the sin of idolaters. The ruinous consequences that followed. Many the evils which had resulted to others, but the most awful fell upon himself and family. To the loss of men, the distress of the camp, the triumphs of the enemy, and the dishonour cast upon the Divine name, ensued the execution of a sentence the most exemplary. How terrible this scene of judgment, more awful than the burning of Jericho. For how small a portion of ill-gotten gain, and how short a time, did he lose life, and all the good to be enjoyed in the land of Canaan. All Israel concurred in the execution of the sentence: it is so spoken of as though every man had cast a stone, and every one thrown fuel to the fire. How awful their case, and how aggravated their crimes, when even those they have lived among are employed by God, as the executioners of His justice. (*W. Seaton.*) *The Babylonish garment*:—I. We find, in the case of Achan, that THE WANDERING AND WANTON EYE WAS THE FIRST AVENUE OF MISCHIEF. Yet this is the very function to which the great Teacher appeals as the first guardian against sin: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." There is an eye in the heart as well as in the head, and Christ, knowing how easily the one is decoyed, enjoins wakefulness upon the other. Keep both open, and let the eye of the conscience supervise and test all that the eye of sense may contemplate. I once went into a garden where a lady and her little child were engaged in putting in some spring roots and seeds. By some mischance, the little plants had got mixed up with some which were only worthless weeds. The child, anxious to be busy, was thrusting all alike indiscriminately into the soil, till the mother checked the little eager hand, and said, "Bring them to me, and let me see them before you put them in, that I may tell you which to plant and which to throw away." And there was an added pleasure in this work of testing and submitting which made the child not only more useful but more happy. And thus, when the child-eye of the sense beholds something which seems goodly and fair, let it be brought to the inspection of the mother-eye of the conscience before it is taken and sown and assimilated into the soil of character. "I saw." The spirit of these times, and of modern habits, addresses itself to this avenue of the heart. The eye of the voluptuary is opened to let in the comely procession which turns the world into a huge Babylonish seraglio. His life is a closing dalliance among houri, till the fever of ignited lust attains its climax of delirium, and then, having conceived its progeny of illusions, brings forth its only permanent offspring—death (Jas. i. 15). The eye of the man of luxury is opened to turn the world into one vast Babylonish kitchen, and the great problem of living is, "What shall I eat? What shall I drink?" We know the guerdon and the result of all such entrail-worship. The meat turns to worms within the pampered lips, and the consequential sequence is—"whose god is their belly, whose end is destruction." The eye of the slave of commerce looks at the world as one great Babylonish mart. There is the wedge of gold, appearing and re-appearing in a thousand shapes. Now it is a lump of solid bullion, now it is melted, minted, stamped into coin; now it is bartered for scrip, now cropping up in consols, now in coupons, now in debentures (a coffin and a grave being the simple end of all the race and turmoil); but through all the changes the wedge is at its wedge-like work, splitting asunder, as it is driven home into the fibres of the life-character, all that gives life its buoyancy, or character its weight, until the whole fabric of the manhood is shivered and destroyed, and the mart becomes a mausoleum, as sin, perfected, brings forth death. And the eye of the proud or the votary of fashion turns the world into a vast Babylonish shop. Life is one interminable Regent Street. There is the goodly Babylonish garment folding and unfolding, and as it rustles

while the smiling courtiers hold it up, first in this light, then in that, it seems to whisper a silken accompaniment to the anxious duet of prudery and foppery which the dolls of fashion are for ever singing, "Wherewithal shall I be clothed?" Lust! Luxury! Commerce! Fashion! They all come like besiegers to this gateway of the eye, and try to storm it. It is the first and the last of these, perhaps, which most hotly assail young men—lust and fashion, both kindred evils, both sore enemies of the soul. The lust of the eye and the pride of life. Beware of them! II. Seeing is WANTING. There is a covetousness of the sense which looks and craves; there is a covetousness of the soul which looks and learns. The first is the lust which consumes itself to death; the second is the patience which watches unto life eternal. Be yours the wiser choice. Don't shut your eyes upon the beauty of the garment or the richness of the gold, but look, that you may adorn the spirit with the beauty, and enrich the soul upon the wealth. III. FATAL GRADATION—the eye, the appetite, the act. The glance, the greed, the gathering. The look, the lust, the larceny. I see a man before me in this place who has looked upon the office and position of another, and who has longed for it, and has begun to take it, by falsehood and innuendo against his character. I see another who has grudged a neighbour his good fortune, and has tried to steal his wedge of gold by driving in the wedge of scandal and detraction to destroy his credit. IV. THE SAME PATH MUST EVER LEAD TO THE SAME END. The lust is soon satiated, and then begins to crave and rage again. The Delilahs who charmed can charm no more; all they can do is to point the white and taper fingers with which they beckoned in derision at your shame, and part the coral lips that smiled you into sin to hiss the taunt, "The Philistines be upon thee." The tresses that you played with are stiffened to Cassandra's snakes, to sting you into fiercer pain. The luxury is soon gone. The Babylonish kitchen is soon empty, and all that is left is but the reek of the past banquet, which sickens and repels. The gold is soon spent, and only emptiness remains. The Babylonish garment is soon threadbare and worn out, and shabbiness, nakedness, and chill are all that linger now. The path along which you look with wanton eye leads to lust, and the lust to sin, and at the end of all is nothing but a grave. The last garment is the shroud—the last shekel is the funeral fee—the last beckoner is death. (*Arthur Mursell.*) *Covetousness:*—The man in the text, in one view, it should seem at first sight, was an object of pity; for gold and silver and fine clothes, to be had for carriage, formed a great temptation. Hence arises a question, why doth providence put in our way such agreeable objects, and yet forbid us to touch them? Let us give glory to God by acknowledging that by such means we are exercised, first as creatures to discover the natural grandeur of our own passions, the incompetence of the world to make us happy, and if reason be not asleep the all-sufficiency of God. Next, these exercises try us as servants, and by the emotions of depraved passions we become acquainted with the natural rebellion of an evil heart, that disputes dominion with God. By an habitual deadness to these, because God commands it, we discover the true religion of a renewed mind, and enter on the enjoyment of conscious rectitude, a preference of virtue, the felicity of heaven. Why, then, do we blame Achan? Because he was not a boy, for none but men above twenty bore arms, and he was old enough to know that he ought not to have disobeyed his general, or his God. Because he was a Jew, and of the tribe of Judah, and had been brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Because he must have heard what mischief, the golden calf, the iniquity of Peor, and the murmuring at Kadesh had brought upon his countrymen. Because he knew God had expressly forbidden plunder. Had he exercised his understanding, some or all these reasons would have cooled his passion for perquisites. In like manner we say of ourselves. We have temptations and passions; but we have reason, too, to resist them. We have passions; but we have had a Christian education, and have been apprised of the danger of gratifying them. We have passions; but we have eyes and ears, and live among people who daily die for gratifying the same passions which we feel. We covet; but God says, "Thou shalt not covet any thing that is thy neighbour's." To covet is to desire beyond due bounds. God hath set these due bounds. He hath bounded passion by reason, and reason by religion and the nature of things. 1. Covetousness is unjust. Let the prince enjoy the privilege of his birth; let the man who hath hazarded his life for wealth possess it in peace; let the industrious enjoy the fruit of his labour; to transfer their property to myself without his consent, and without putting something as good in the place, would be an act of injustice. Only to covet is to wish to be unjust. 2. Covetousness is cruel. A man of this disposition is obliged to harden his heart

against a thousand plaintive voices, voices of poor, fatherless, sick, aged, and bereaved people in distress; voices that set many an eye a-trickling, but which make no impression on a covetous man. 3. Covetousness is ungrateful. Shall the whole world labour for this old miser, one to feed him, another to guard him, and all to make him happy, and shall he resemble the barren earth that returns nothing to him that dresseth it? This is a black ingratitude. 4. Covetousness is a foolish vice; it destroys a man's reputation, makes everybody suspect him for a thief, and watch him; it breaks his rest, fills him with care and anxiety, excites the avarice of a robber, and the indignation of a housebreaker; it endangers his life, and, depart how he will, he dies unblest and unpitied. 5. Covetousness is unprecedented in all our examples of virtue. It is Judas, who hanged himself, and not such as Peter, whom covetous men imitate. 6. Covetousness is idolatry. It is the idolatry of the heart, where, as in a temple, a miserable wretch excludes God, sets up gold instead of Him, and places that confidence in it which belongs to the great Supreme alone. Achan, and all such as he, cause a great deal of trouble, and to pass everything else let us only observe what covetous men do with their wealth. "Behold, it is hid in the earth in the midst of my tent." Observe a miser with his bag. With what an arch and jealous leer the wily fox creeps stealthily about to earth his prey! He hath not a friend in the world, and judging of others by himself, he thinks there is not an honest man upon earth, no, not one that can be trusted. 1. Remark his caution. He turns his back on his idol, trudges far away, looks lean, and hangs all about his own skeleton ensigns of poverty, never avoiding people in real distress, but always comforting himself with the hope that nobody knows of his treasure, and that therefore nobody expects any assistance from him. 2. Take notice of the just contempt in which mankind hold this hoary mass of meanness. He thinks his wealth is hid; but it is not hid, his own anxious side-looks betray the secret. People reckon for him, talk over all his profits, omit his expenses and losses, declare his wealth to be double what it is, and judge of his duty according to their own notions of his fortune. One lays out his good work for him, another rates him at so much towards such a charity, and all execrate him for not doing what is not in his power. 3. Mark his hypocrisy. He weeps over the profligacy of the poor, and says it is a sad thing that they are brought up without being educated in the fear of God. He laments every time the bell tolls the miserable condition of widows and orphans. He celebrates the praise of learning, and wishes public speakers had all the powers of a learned criticism, and all the graces of elocution. He prays for the downpouring of the Spirit, and the outgoings of God in His sanctuary, and then, how his soul would be refreshed! What a comfortable Christian would he be then! Tell him that the gratitude of widows, the hymns of orphans, and the blessings of numbers ready to perish, are the presence of God in His Church. Tell him all these wait to pour themselves like a tide into his congregation, and wait only for a little of his money to pay for cutting a canal. See how thunderstruck he is! His solemn face becomes lank and black; he suspects he has been too liberal already, his generosity has been often abused. Why should he be taxed and others spared? The Lord will save His own elect; God is never at a loss for means, no exertions will do without the Divine presence and blessing; and besides, his property is all locked up, "Behold, it is hid in the earth in the midst of my tent!" Let us respect truth even in the mouth of a miser. This ignoble soul tells you that he would not give a wedge of gold to save you all from eternal ruin; but he says God is not like him, God loves you, and will save you freely. This is strictly and literally true. There have been thousands of poor people besides you who have been instructed and animated, converted and saved, without having paid one penny for the whole; but this, instead of freezing, should melt the hearts of all who are able, and set them a-running into acts of generosity. I conclude with the words of Ambrose. "Joshua," said he, "could stop the course of the sun; but all his power could not stop the course of avarice. The sun stood still, but avarice went on. Joshua obtained a victory when the sun stood still; but when avarice was at work, Joshua was defeated." (*R. Robinson.*) *Achan's sin*:—"I coveted." What multitudes of sinners of that class are to be found—revenge, theft, adultery, murder, carried on in the feelings. This is the secret of the sudden falls and failures in society. Achan must have had a weakness for at least looking at questionable and unlawful things before this trouble. Woe to the man who cannot confront a bad impulse with the solid masonry of a good character! Unless we thus fence ourselves off from evil, our downfall will be only a matter of time. Only character, evolved from the principles of truth and righteousness, can withstand the seductive

influences of the world and the attacks of the powers of darkness. The influence of home and friends is all that keeps many people straight and respectable. Like coopers' casks, they are held upright and in shape by the hoops of external influences that surround them. Woe to the man whose restraints are all on the outside! The internal, more than the external, should suggest our conduct, and shape our activities. It is the Japanese, I think, who say that a snake is quite orderly and straight so long as you keep it in a bamboo stick, but the moment it gets out it begins to wriggle and act snaky. So there are many who are quite decorous and respectable while in the bamboo of home influences who show the old serpent and act snaky enough when such restraints are taken away. (*T. Kelly.*) *Achan:*— Jericho was one of the largest and richest cities in all ancient Canaan. At one time, indeed, and but for the terrible ban pronounced by Joshua, Jericho might have taken the place of Jerusalem itself as the chief city of ancient Israel. Jericho was an excellently situated and a strongly fenced city. There were great foundries of iron and brass in Jericho, with workshops also in silver and in gold. The looms of Babylonia were already famous over all the eastern world, and their rich and beautiful textures went far and near, and were warmly welcomed wherever the commercial caravans of that day carried them. "A goodly Babylonish garment" plays a prominent part in the tragical history that now opens before us. The rich and licentious city of Jericho was doomed of God to swift overthrow and absolute extermination, but no part of the spoil, neither thread nor shoe-lachet, was to be so much as touched by Joshua or any of his armed men. Nothing demoralises an army like sacking a fallen city. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life." And Joshua and all his men received a crown of life that night—all his men but one. Who is that stealing about among the smoking ruins? Is that some soldier of Jericho who has saved himself from the devouring sword? 1. Everybody who reads the best books will have long had by heart Thomas a Kempis's famous description of the successive steps of a successful temptation. There is first the bare thought of the sin. Then, upon that, there is a picture of the sin formed and hung up on the secret screen of the imagination. A strange sweetness from that picture is then let down drop by drop into the heart; and then that secret sweetness soon secures the consent of the whole soul, and the thing is done. That is true, and it is powerful enough. But Achan's confession to Joshua is much simpler, and still closer to the truth: "I saw the goodly Babylonish garment, I coveted it, I took it, and I hid it in my tent." Had Joshua happened to post the ensign of Judah opposite the poor part of the city this sad story would never have been told. But even as it was, had Achan only happened to stand a little to the one side, or a little to the other side of where he did stand, in that case he would not have seen that beautiful piece, and not seeing it he would not have coveted it, and would have gone home to his tent that night a good soldier and an honest man. But when once Achan's eyes lighted on that rich garment he never could get his eyes off it again. As a Kempis says, the seductive thing got into Achan's imagination, and the devil's work was done. Achan was in a fever now lest he should lose that goodly garment. He was terrified lest any of his companions should have seen that glittering piece. He was sure some of them had seen it, and was making off with it. He stood in between it and the searchers. He turned their attention to something else. And then when their backs were about he rolled it up in a hurry, and the gold and the silver inside of it, and thrust it down into a hiding-place. His eyes were Achan's fatal snare. It was his eyes that stoned Achan and burned him and his household to dust in the valley of Achor. Had God seen it to be good to make men and women in some way without eyes the Fall itself would have been escaped. In his despair to get the devil out of his heart Job swore a solemn oath and made a holy covenant with his eyes. But our Saviour, as He always does, goes far deeper than Job. He knows quite well that no oath that Job ever swore, and no covenant that Job ever sealed, will hold any man's eyes in; and therefore He demands of all His disciples that their eyes shall be plucked out. He pulls down His own best handiwork at its finest part so that He may get the devil's handiwork destroyed and rooted out of it; and then He will let us have all our eyes back again when and where we are fit to be trusted with eyes. Miss Rossetti is writing to young ladies, but what she says to them it will do us all good to hear. "True," says that fine writer, "all our lives long we shall be bound to refrain our soul, and to keep it low; but what then? For the books we now forbear to read, we shall one day be endued with wisdom and knowledge. For the music we will not listen to, we shall join in the song of the redeemed. For the

pictures from which we turn, we shall gaze unabashed on the Beatific Vision. For the companionships we shun, we shall be welcomed into angelic society and the communion of triumphant saints. For all the amusements we avoid, we shall keep the supreme jubilee." Yes, it is as certain as God's truth and righteousness are certain, that the crucified man who goes about with his eyes out; the man who steals along the street seeing neither smile nor frown; he who keeps his eyes down wherever men and women congregate, in the Church, in the market-place, at a station, on a ship's deck, at an inn table, where you will; that man escapes multitudes of temptations that more open and more full-eyed men and women continually fall before. You huff and toss your head at that. But these things are not spoken for you yet, but for those who have sold and cut off both eye and ear, and hand and foot, and life itself, if all that will only carry them one single step nearer their salvation. 2. Look at the camp of Israel that awful morning! It is the day of judgment, and the great white throne is set in the valley of Achor before its proper time. Look how the hearts of those fathers and mothers who have sons in the army beat till they cannot hear the last trump. Did you ever spend a night like that night in Achan's tent? A friend of mine once slept in a room in a hotel in Glasgow through the wall from a man who made him think sometimes that a madman had got into the house. Sometimes he thought it must be a suicide, and sometimes a damned soul come back for a visit to the city of its sins. But he understood the mysterious noises of the night next morning when the officers came in and beckoned to a gentleman who sat at the breakfast-table, and drove him off to a penal settlement, where he died. Groanings that cannot be imitated to you were heard by all Achan's neighbours all that night. Till one bold man rose and lifted a loop of Achan's tent in the darkness, and saw Achan still burying deeper and deeper his sin. O sons and daughters of discovered Achan! O guilty and dissembling sinners! It is all in vain. It is all utterly and absolutely in vain. Be sure as God is in heaven, and as He has His eyes upon you, that your sin will find you out. You think that the darkness will cover you. Wait till you see! 3. The eagle that stole a piece of sacred flesh from the altar brought home a smouldering coal with it that kindled up afterwards and burned up both her whole nest and all her young ones. And so did Achan. It was very sore upon Achan's sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had. But things are as they are. God gathers the solitary into families for good, and the good family tie still continues to hold even when all the members of the family have done evil. Once a father, always a father: the relationship stands. Once a son, always a son, even when a prodigal son. Every son has his father's grey hairs and his mother's anxious heart in his hands, and no possible power can alter that. Drop that stolen flesh! A coal is in it that shall never be quenched. 4. Make a clean breast of it, then. Go home to your tent to-night, go home to your lodgings, take up the accursed thing out of its hiding-place, and lay it out before Joshua, if not before all Israel. Lay it out and say, "Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done." And if you do not know what more to say, if you are speechless beside that accursed thing, try this; say this. Ask and say, "Is Thy name indeed Jesus? Dost Thou indeed save found-out men from their sins? Art Thou still set forth to be a propitiation? Art Thou truly able to save to the uttermost? For I am the chief of sinners," say. Lie down on the floor of your room—you need not think it too much for you to do that, or that it is an act unworthy of your manhood to do it: the Son of God did it for you on the floor of Gethsemane. Yes, lie down on the floor of your sinful room, and lay your tongue in the dust of it, and say this about yourself: say that you, naming yourself, are the offscouring of all men. For "thus and thus," naming it, "have I done." And then say this—

"The dying thief rejoiced to see
That Fountain in his day"—

and see what the true Joshua will stand over you and say to you. 5. Therefore the name of that place is called the valley of Achor to this day. Achor; that is, as interpreted on the margin, "Trouble"—the valley of trouble. "Why hast thou troubled us?" demanded Joshua of Achan. "The Lord shall trouble thee this day." The Lord troubled Achan in judgment that day, but He is troubling you in mercy in your day. Yes; already your trouble is a door of hope. You will sing yet as you never sang in the days of your youth. You never sang songs like these in the days of your youth, or before your trouble came—songs like these: The Lord will be a

refuge for the overwhelmed: a refuge in the time of trouble. Thou art my hiding-place; Thou shalt preserve me from trouble; Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. *A. Whyte, D.D.*)

Vers. 25, 26. **And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the Lord shall trouble thee this day.**—*The troubles of sin*:—I. THAT SIN IS A VERY TROUBLESOME THING. 1. The load of guilt by which it oppresses us. 2. The shifts, subterfuges, and tricks resorted to for the purpose of concealing our sins, or transferring the blame to others, are convincing proofs that sin troubles us. 3. Sin troubles us by its corrupt and restless influence on the tempers and dispositions. 4. But it is chiefly into futurity that we are to look for the troubles of sin (Prov. xi. 21; Ezek. xviii. 4; Romans vi. 23). II. HOWEVER ARTFULLY CONCEALED, SIN MUST BE EXPOSED. 1. The most secret sins are often revealed in this world. 2. Those sins that escape detection here, will be manifested in the last day (Eccles. xii. 14). III. WHEN THE SINNER IS EXPOSED, HE IS LEFT WITHOUT ANY REASONABLE EXCUSE. Joshua said, "Why hast thou troubled us?" What could he say? Could he plead ignorance of the law? No; it was published in the camp of Israel. The weakness of human nature? No; he had strength to do his duty. The prevalence of temptation? No; others had similar temptations, and yet conquered. And what shall we have to say when God shall summon us to His bar? IV. THAT PUNISHMENT TREADS UPON THE HEELS OF SIN. "The Lord shall trouble thee this day." 1. God has power to trouble sinners. The whole creation is a "capacious reservoir of means," which He can employ at His pleasure. 2. God will trouble sinners. He will either bring them to repentance, when they shall "look upon Him whom they have pierced, and mourn," or He will vex them in His wrath, and dash them in pieces as a potter's vessel. Infer—1. What a powerful preventive this should be to deter us from committing sin. 2. See the madness of sinners, who, for the sake of a few sordid despicable pleasures, which always leave a sting behind, will desperately plunge themselves into an abyss of troubles which know no bound nor termination. 3. Since sin is so troublesome, let us all seek a deliverance from its dominion and influence. 4. Learn what ideas you should entertain of those who seek to entice you to sin. They are agents of the devil, and you should shun them as you would shun perdition. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*) **Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire.**—*Achan's punishment*:—The punishment of Achan himself offers no difficulty. He knew the decree, and chose to stake his life against a few valuable articles which excited his rapacity. The maintenance of discipline in an army is at all times of first importance. In the Peninsula War two men were shot for stealing apples, pilfering having been proclaimed a capital crime. The Duke of Wellington was a humane man, but he knew the need of obedience to law and the value of a striking example. The Israelites were a nation and army in one. Regard for the general welfare, above all private aggrandisement, had to be encouraged. The sense of a common interest would soon be undermined, if a pilfering spirit set in and a greedy selfishness received any countenance. Moreover, at all costs, reverence for their Deity had to be upheld. His majesty must be vindicated. Disastrous results could only follow upon a diminution of the religious sentiment among the people. But the association of Achan's family in his terrible penalty, as a calm judicial proceeding, sends a thrill of horror through our hearts. But then, we are "the heirs of all the ages, in the foremost files of time." We enjoy the inheritance of millenniums of Divine education. We could not expect Joshua to act in advance of the spirit of his time. The ancient world was deficient in its conception of what a man was. It was long before it came to regard him as an individual, a being complete in himself. So long as one man continued to be considered as part of another, or in any sense the property of another, so long fathers might pledge the lives of their children, and whole families expiate the crimes of a single member without shocking the public sense of justice. But is it not said that the destruction of Achan's family was by the express command of Jehovah? Is not this the explanation? The command, shaping itself within the mind of Joshua in the form of an overmastering conviction, would be that justice should be executed. Joshua could only understand justice in the sense in which his contemporaries understood it. His moral sense would give the character and colour to the justice to be dealt out. His inmost conviction, which was, in truth, the inspired message of his God, forced upon him the necessity for a signal vindication of the majesty of loyalty and uprightness, and he acted up to the light which he possessed. (*T. W. M. Lund, M.A.*) *The troubling of Achan*:—Two questions present themselves.

Why should all Israel have been put to shame and defeat for the sin of one man? And why should God have required the whole congregation in this dramatic way to take part in the execution of the offender? To our minds at first thought it would seem likely to brutalise the hearts of the people, that all should be required to take part in that bloody vengeance. For the sake of example, God might wish the whole congregation to be present at the taking of the lot. He could have pointed out the criminal to Joshua in some simple and direct way, but He chose to give all Israel a most salutary warning. That the unerring finger of Jehovah should thus single out the guilty man was a striking object-lesson concerning the truth that no sin is so secret as to be hidden from the all-searching God. But this does not explain why all the people should have been made to suffer shame and defeat because of Achan's sin, for the great investigation might have been made just as thoroughly before the defeat at Ai. We might say, perhaps, that Israel needed the lesson of this defeat to teach them their dependence upon God for the smallest as well as the greatest victory. We fancy we can detect a little vein of boastfulness in the words of the scouts (ver. 3). And if we ask concerning the thirty and six men who perished while Israel was receiving this lesson in humility, we may reply that such matters must be left, and can without disquietude be left in the hands of God. We cannot know about individual lives. God certainly in all cases deals wisely and mercifully. Yet we have not progressed very far in our solution of this difficulty, that God permitted all Israel to suffer for the sin of one man. And it is a difficulty worth trying to solve, because it is of the same sort as that which meets us every day of our lives, and makes heedless men question the justice and fairness of Almighty God. Who is there that has not suffered hurt, or trouble, or unhappiness, from the misdoings of his neighbours? The embezzler gets the money of hundreds of poor and unsuspecting people invested in his dazzling schemes, and then goes off with his booty, leaving desolation and misery behind. How many people suffer from the malignity or hatred of their fellows, because they have innocently offended them. Aye, how many suffer, often most cruelly, from the heedlessness and thoughtlessness of others, who never meant to do harm, but talked foolishly and excessively about things they did not understand. We think of the mischief we have endured at the hands of others, knowing that we deserved nothing of it; and we say, "Why does God allow the innocent thus to suffer for other men's sins?" Perhaps, indeed, it is to remind us that we are not so guiltless as we fancy. We dwell upon the harm done us by others, and we seldom think of the many ways in which we do others harm, it may be quite thoughtlessly, but still very mischievously. Our hasty and ill-considered words, our unlovely examples, how much mischief these may do our fellow-men, while we are quite oblivious of it. A young man is dishonest, and makes off with large sums of his employer's money; we condemn him heartily, and yet it may be in the sight of God that the very atmosphere in which he was brought up in our midst was so filled with the praise of wealth and the excellence of shrewdness and business ability, the power of capital, and the good things which money can bring into one's life, that our words and views have been the teachers which fostered in the transgressor's heart the very sin we now so unsparingly condemn. May it not be that the very wrongs we so often have to suffer undeservedly at the hands of others are the merciful agencies of God, to let us endure a little of the penalty our own careless words and evil examples deserve, which constantly, all unsuspected by ourselves, are doing mischief to our neighbours? We have no right, then, even to complain of injustice in the fact that we have to suffer for other men's sins, unless we can be sure that our sins do not cause as great injury to the souls, if not to the bodies, of many of our fellow-men. There is a deeper sense yet in which we may take this lesson of all Israel suffering for Achan's transgression. God thus taught His people the solidarity of their national life as His people. In other words, that men have responsibility for their neighbours. No one in Israel might say, "This is none of my affair," for God showed them that the sin of one man affected the whole community; therefore the whole community had a certain responsibility towards individual transgression. Civilised nations all admit this responsibility of humanity, at least to a certain degree. Men hear of flood or famine or pestilence in some far-off part of the world, devastating populous districts in India, or China, or some distant island of the Pacific. Immediately the sentiment of humanity opens their purses, and relief goes forth generously to the sufferers. Why should we concern ourselves to help those savages, who would as likely as not murder us if we went among them as travellers? Because they are men; they share in our common humanity, and we may not forget our brotherhood

of race. Why should European nations send war-ships to the Red Sea and the East African coast to stop the Arabian slave trade? What right have they to interfere? You reply that the slave-trade is brutal and inhuman, and the sentiment of humanity compels those who have the power to interfere, to save the poor blacks from their fiendish persecutors. Carry the same thought a little further, and you get the higher Christian conception of man's duty to all his fellow-men. What is the greatest evil in the world? You reply sin, because sin is the root of all other evils. Well, then, we Christians owe it to humanity to do all that lies in our power to take sin away from the world. That is the great principle of Christian missions. No matter if the missions do not seem to be very successful, we shall not have missed this lesson of the sufferings we have to endure for other men's sins if we have bravely done what was in our power to make known to our fellow-men the efficacy of the precious blood of Christ. Our other question was, Why did God require the whole congregation to take part in the stoning of Achan? There are evils of ignorance, there are also evils of wanton defiance of the known law of right. So long as men sin in ignorance and superstition we may be moved only by compassion to help them. The missionary spirit must always be that of Christlike pity for them that are ignorant and out of the way. England sends her heroic missionaries into the heart of Africa and of China while at the same time she patrols the Red Sea with warships to stop at the cannon's mouth the slave trade, and sends an army up the Irrawaddy to conquer the monster King Theebaw of Burmah, and so to put a stop to his terrible cruelties. Is there inconsistency in this? No. It was quite as much the duty of Israel to stone Achan as it was to teach their children with loving assiduity the enormity of disobeying Jehovah. We owe it to God to do what lies in our power to put down flagrant iniquity. We are much too careless about this in our Christian lives. We may not punish individuals, for God commits that authority to the State; but we are bound to confront and denounce all iniquitous principle, to stand up and fight against God-defying sin. No matter if we do not succeed in slaying Achan. No matter if men tell us to mind our own business, and not to interfere with them. It is a great thing to have thrown a stone for the Lord, even if it has seemed in no wise to hurt the enemy. (*Arthur Ritchie.*)

They raised over him a great heap of stones.—*Nemesis*:—Again we stand beside a heap of stones. Again it will be profitable to put and to answer the question, "What mean ye by these stones?" This is the third occasion on which such a question might arise. The first heap of stones was raised on the brink of Jordan; the second lay some miles distant; the third is still further in the land. The first heap was a token of Jehovah's might; for taken from the river-bed by twelve stalwart warriors, they told to all succeeding generations that by a strong hand and a stretched-out arm Israel was brought into Canaan. The second heap, stretched far and wide, the ruins of a famous city, was the token of Jehovah's judgment. This third heap in the valley of Achor, the cairn erected over the dead body of Achan, was the token of Jehovah's discipline. The twelve stones speak of Jehovah's relation to the sin of those who trust Him and accept His leadership. He buries all their iniquities, He brings them into His promised inheritance, and gives them a permanent place therein. The ruined city speaks of Jehovah's relation to the sin of these who stubbornly resist Him. He smites them with a rod of iron. This rugged pile speaks of Jehovah's relation to the sin of those who profess to obey Him, but who in their deeds deny Him. If He judges the world, much more must He judge His own house. The twelve stones on Jordan's bank were a monument of Israel's hope. He who had led them over, and brought them in, would assuredly bless them with all earthly blessings in His fair heritage. The ruins of Jericho were a monument of Israel's faith. For nothing but faith could have been so patient, so docile, so mighty, so victorious—"By faith the walls of Jericho fell down." The heap in the valley of Achor was a monument of Israel's love. They heaped up this cairn of condemnation to show their detestation of the crime of which Achan was guilty. Thus this act revealed their love to God in the strongest light. By this third heap we stand, and as we do so, let us ponder the discovery of Achan's crime, its confession, and its punishment. Joshua gave himself no rest till he got to the root of this matter. Though appalled by such severe tokens of the Divine displeasure, he did not murmur against God, but persistently made inquiry of God. He did not complain of God, he complained to God; and his faithful persistency was rewarded (vers. 10–12). "Get thee up. My mind has not changed. My arm is not shortened. My word is not broken. Get thee up, for the discovery and punish-

ment of this sin." The discovery of Achan's sin was, therefore, the result of Divine directions. It was God who set everything in motion for the detection of the hidden criminal. The discovery was undertaken most solemnly, as a deeply spiritual and religious act (ver. 13). Three times in the course of their history had the children of Israel been thus called solemnly to sanctify themselves. On the first occasion, it was at the foot of Sinai, in prospect of the giving of the law. On the second occasion it was at Jordan, in prospect of entering into the land. On the third occasion, it was here, in prospect of the discovery and punishment of the transgressor. To receive God's will, to enter into God's inheritance, to purge away transgression, such things demand the most thorough consecration. It is plain from the Divine record that Israel went about this solemn work in the right way. There was no burst of ungovernable excitement and blind popular fury. With judicial calmness and religious reverence, the terrible drama was begun, continued, and ended. It was also prosecuted deliberately. There was no unseemly haste or confusion. A proclamation was made in the evening previous as to the manner of procedure on the following day; and then the carrying out of the process of casting lots must have been slow and deliberate. What a night must that have been for Joshua! How thankfully must he have laid himself to rest in the blessed consciousness that as surely as the darkness of night would fly before the dawning day, so all his difficulties would vanish, and all the disgrace of Israel would be blotted out. And what a night must that have been for Achan! He would feel as did another whose mental torture a great poet has described—

> "Macbeth hath murdered sleep, the innocent sleep,
> Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleave of care,
> Balm of hurt minds."

Oh! what a long, black, miserable night was that. The voice cried, "Sleep no more," and on the morrow, as with bloodshot eyes he took his place in the ranks of his tribe, what must have been his terror! And then to mark the circle of condemnation closing upon him, growing less and less at each casting of the lot, he rooted meanwhile to the dark spot, its centre, till at last, pointed out by the finger of God, he stood alone, the incarnation of disaster and disgrace, the hateful object for every eye in Israel, the awful focus of their fiery indignation, burning into his soul one thought, one agony, "We have found thee, O our enemy." The method of discovery was most impressive for the people, revealing so marvellously the finger of God. Whatever the precise process of the lot may have been, and that is hard to discover, there was no difficulty, hesitation, timidity, uncertainty, or partiality in its carrying out. The method of discovering the crime was also the most merciful that could have been adopted for the offender. It gave him time to think; a blessed space for repentance; an opportunity, if there was any spark of spiritual life within, to cast off the incubus of iniquity. Every step would serve to convince him how utterly foolish it was to promise himself secrecy in sin, and how certainly at the last God would discriminate between the innocent and the guilty, however for a little while they were involved in the same condemnation. Thus Achan stands exposed in the sight of all Israel. Joshua, filled with unutterable compassion for the trembling sinner, though absolutely certain of his guilt, has no harsh word to utter, but only seeks to win him to a right frame of mind. Nothing could be more touching than this venerable leader's words. He deals with him as a grey-haired father with a wayward son, urging him to the only course that in the circumstances could yield one spark of consolation (ver. 19). Achan breaks down under this unexpected kindness. He had looked for nothing but harsh reproof and unmitigated severity; therefore in broken accents he replies, "Indeed I have sinned," &c. This confession is worthy of notice, and has some features which relieve the darkness of the scene. To begin with, it was voluntary. There was here no extortion of a confession from unwilling lips. Joshua spoke in love, calling him "my son." It is evident that he has no personal ill-will, no hard spirit of revenge. He appealed to the glory of God. Thus Joshua brought forth this free confession of Achan's guilt. His confession was as full as it was free. The miserable man kept nothing back. He made a clean breast of it. His full confession shows that penitents cannot be too particular. His confession was also personal. He felt that it was first of all, and above all, a matter between himself and God, and therefore, though others, in all likelihood, were sharers in his guilt (for he could not well have hid these things in

his tent without the cognisance of his family), still he made no mention of them, he condemned none but himself, for he felt himself the greatest sinner. Also Achan's confession was sincere. He did not attempt in the faintest degree to excuse himself. He pleaded no palliation of his offence. Surely, therefore, in this confession we have a gleam of light thrown across the gloom of this narrative. Just as in a picture of this dark valley and its black pile of stones, we have seen one white bird hovering amid the gloom, so this confession is the white bird of hope hovering over Achan's grave, and relieving somewhat the blackness of its darkness. His punishment trod swiftly on the heels of his confession. This punishment was at once a solemn expression of the evil of sin, a vindication of God's truth and justice, a prelude to future victory, and a monument to all succeeding ages, declaring, "be sure your sin will find you out." We are also told that all Achan's substance was destroyed, that which he possessed, as well as that which he stole. What a poor prize had Achan then in the things he so much admired. No good ever comes of ill-gotten gains. In regard to this punishment of Achan, the fate of his family deserves to be noticed. What happened to them? Two explanations have been offered. The first is that they shared Achan's sin and therefore shared his punishment. Another explanation is that Achan's family were spared. This rests on the fact that there is a change from the plural in ver. 24 to the singular in ver. 25. Joshua took Achan and all his possessions and all his family to the scene of execution, but the punishment fell only on Achan, for Joshua said (ver. 25): "Why hast thou troubled us? the Lord will trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them (his cattle and goods) with fire after they had stoned them with stones." Whichever is the true explanation we may rest assured that the demands of justice were not ignored. Thus we leave Achan, and surely as we stand by this heap of stones and consider his sad end, these words come to mind—"the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." Looking again at this event, we are struck with the parallelism between the early history of Israel as recorded in the Book of Joshua and the early history of the Church as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. The taking of Jericho corresponds in its mighty triumph to the Day of Pentecost and the casting down of the walls of rebellion and prejudice through the proclamation of the gospel. Then the sin of Achan is strikingly paralleled by that of Ananias and Sapphira. The cause of transgression was the same in both, and the punishments present a striking resemblance. It was a salutary lesson taught both to Israel and to the Church. It showed that the God who dwelt among men was a consuming fire, that His judgment must follow shortly and surely on the heels of sin, and that holiness is the only source and secret of success in the work of the Lord. (*A. B. Mackay.*) The valley of Achor.—*The valley of Achor:*—I. WE SHOULD GRIEVE MORE FOR SIN THAN FOR ITS RESULTS. As soon as we have committed sin, we look furtively round to see whether we have been watched, and then we take measures to tie up the consequences which would naturally accrue. Failing this, we are deeply humiliated. We dread the consequences of sin more than sin; discovery more than misdoing; what others may say and do more than the look of pain and sorrow on the face that looks out on us from the encircling throng of glorified spirits. But with God it is not so. It is our sin, one of the most grievous features in which is our failure to recognise its intrinsic evil, that presses Him down, as a cart groans beneath its load. The true way to a proper realisation of sin is to cultivate the friendship of the holy God. The more we know Him, the more utterly we shall enter into His thought about the subtle evil of our heart. We shall find sin lurking where we least anticipated, in our motives, in our religious acts, in our hasty judgment of others, in our want of tender, sensitive, pitying love, in our censorious condemnation of those who may be restrained by the action of a more sensitive conscience than our own from claiming all that we claim to possess. We shall learn that every look, tone, gesture, word, thought, which is not consistent with perfect love indicates that the virus of sin has not yet been expelled from our nature, and we shall come to mourn not so much for the result of sin as for the sin itself. II. WE SHOULD SUBMIT OURSELVES TO THE JUDGMENT OF GOD. "And the Lord said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?" It was as if He said, "Thou grievest for the effect, grieve rather for the cause. I am well able to preserve My people from the assaults of their foes,

though all Canaan beset them, and I am equally able to maintain the honour of My name. These are not the main matters for concern, but that a worm is already gnawing at the root of the gourd, and a plague is already eating out the vitals of the people whom I have redeemed. With My right arm I will screen you from attack, whilst you give yourselves to the investigation and destruction of the accursed thing." Whenever there is perpetual failure in our life, we may be sure that there is some secret evil lurking in heart and life, just as diphtheria breaking out repeatedly in a household is an almost certain indication that there is an escape of sewer gas from the drains. 1. In searching out the causes of failure we must be willing to know the worst, and this is almost the hardest condition. Ostrich-like, we all hide our heads in the sand from unwelcome tidings. It is the voice of an iron resolution, or of mature Christian experience, that can say without faltering, "Let me know the worst." But as we bare ourselves to the good Physician let us remember that He is our husband, that His eyes film with love and pity, that He desires to indicate the source of our sorrow only to remove it, so that for Him and for us there may be the vigour of perfect soul-health and consequent bliss. 2. When God deals with sin He traces back its genealogy. Notice the particularity with which twice over the sacred historian gives the list of Achan's progenitors. It is always, "Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah" (vers. 1, 16–18). Sin is sporadic. To deal with it thoroughly we need to go back to its parentage. A long period will often intervene between the first germ of sin, in a permitted thought or glance of evil, and its flower or fruit in act. We generally deal with the wrong that flames out before the sight of our fellows; we should go behind to the spark as it lay smouldering for hours before, and to the carelessness which left it there. We only awake when the rock disintegrates and begins to fall on our cottage roof; God would lead us back to the moment when a tiny seed, borne on the breeze, floating through the air, found a lodgment in some crevice of our heart, and, although the soil was scanty, succeeded in keeping its foothold, till it had struck down its tiny anchor into a crack, and gathered strength enough to split the rock which had given it welcome. And by this insight into small beginnings our God would forearm us against great catastrophes. 3. It is a good thing at times to muster the clans of heart and life. We must make the principal tribes of our being pass before God. The public, and private, our behaviour in the business, the family, the church, until one of them is taken. Then to take that department and go through its various aspects and engagements, analysing it in days, or duties; resolving it into its various elements, and scrutinising each. This duty of self-examination should be pursued by those who have least relish for it, as probably they really need it; whilst they who are naturally of an introspective or morbid disposition should not engage themselves in it to any large extent. And whoever undertakes it should do so in reliance on the Holy Spirit, and give ten glances to the blessed Lord for every one that is taken at the corruptions of the natural heart. It is looking off unto Jesus which is the real secret of soul-growth. III. WE SHOULD HOLD NO PARLEY WITH DISCOVERED SIN. God never reveals an evil which He does not require us to remove. And if heart and flesh fail, if our hand refuses to obey our faltering will, if the paralysis of evil has so far enfeebled us that we cannot lift the stone, or wield the knife, or strike the flint stones for the fire, then He will do for us what must be done, but which we cannot do. Some are cast in a mould so strong that they can dare to raise the hatchet, and cut off the arm just madly bitten, and before poison has passed from it into the system; others must await the surgeon's knife. But the one lesson for all the inner life is to be willing for God to do His work in us, through us, or for us. So the valley of Achor becomes the door of hope. From that sterile, mountain-guarded valley, Israel marched to victory; or, to use the highly-coloured imagery of Hosea, it was as though the massive slabs opened in the cliffs, and the people passed into cornfields, vineyards, and olive-yards, singing amid their rich luxuriance as they sang in their youth in the day when they came up out of Egypt. Ah! metaphor as true as fair! For all our inner life there is no valley of Achor where the work of execution is faithfully performed in which there is not a door of hope, entrance into the garden of the Lord, and a song so sweet, so joyous, so triumphant, as though the buoyancy of youth were wed with the experience and mellowness of age. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*)

CHAPTER VIII.

VERS. 1, 2. Fear not . . . I have given into thy hand the king of Ai.—*The use of failure*:—"Fear not." How much of our misery arises from fear! How many a beating heart, how many a shaking nerve, how many a sleepless night have come, not from evil experienced, but from evil apprehended! To save one from the apprehension of evil is sometimes more important, as it is usually far more difficult, than to save one from evil itself. An affectionate father finds that one of his most needed services to his children is to allay their fears. Never is he doing them a greater kindness than when he uses his larger experience of life to assure them, in some anxiety, that there is no cause for fear. Our heavenly Father finds much occasion for a similar course. Virtually the command to Joshua is to "try again." Success, though denied to the first effort, often comes to the next, or at least to a subsequent one. Even apart from spiritual considerations, it is those who try oftenest who succeed best. There is little good in a man who abandons an undertaking simply because he has tried once and failed. Who does not recall in this connection the story of Alfred the Great? Or of Robert the Bruce watching the spider in the barn that at last reached the roof after sixteen failures? Or, looking to what has a more immediate bearing on the kingdom of God, who has not admired the perseverance of Livingstone, undaunted by fever and famine and the ferocity of savage chiefs; unmoved by his longings for home and dreams of plenty and comfort that mocked him when he awoke to physical wretchedness and want? Such perseverance gives a man the stamp of true nobility. To Christian men especially failure brings very valuable lessons. There is always something to be learned from it. In our first attempt we were too self-confident. We went too carelessly about the matter, and did not sufficiently realise the need of Divine support. In the case of Joshua and his people, one of the chief lessons derived from their failure before Ai was the evil of covering sin. Alas, this policy is the cause of failures innumerable in the spiritual life! In numberless ways it interrupts Divine fellowship, withdraws the Divine blessing, and grieves the Holy Spirit. Joshua is instructed to go up again against Ai, but in order to interest and encourage the people he resorts to a new plan of attack. A stratagem is to be put in operation. (*W. G. Blaikie, D.D.*) *The right policy*:—I. These words were spoken TO GIVE ENCOURAGEMENT. God began His address with the exhortation, "Fear not." This indeed constitutes the burden of comfort which it contains. God would renew Joshua's confidence; for this is always essential to success in the work of the Lord. Without holy confidence there can be no good hopes, no wise plans, no buoyant energy, no patient endurance, no successful campaign. The fact that this was an old exhortation made it doubly dear. Israel's sins had been confessed, acknowledged, judged, therefore God is faithful and just to forgive it, thoroughly, absolutely. These words of God also contain a promise. "Ai is thine"; this is the pledge given. It was sure, for God's Word is never broken. And it was as sweet as it was sure. It was the encouragement of a perfect love that had long been experienced and enjoyed; a new outpouring of its glory most grateful and precious. II. But God thus addressed Joshua in order TO REPROVE AN ERROR. The spies had said, "Let not all the people go up," &c. Here God says, "Take all the people with thee, and arise, go up to Ai." Here God points out the error of division in His work, the error of thinking that part can do the work designed for the whole. The policy of the spies was a policy of pride. They were elated with their marvellous success at Jericho, with that brilliant victory so easily won; and therefore when they came to look at Ai their hearts were filled with contempt. And the feelings which influenced them still possess the human heart. How dangerous is success to the individual, to the congregation, to the Church! The policy of the spies was also one of ignorance and disobedience. It was opposed to the Divine design and command. So is it now. God has never said to any of His children, "Son, go to church, enjoy the services, criticise the sermons, bury yourself in business and pleasure from Monday till Saturday." No, but He does say, "Son, go work." And He says that to every son whom He acknowledges. No Christian can shake off his responsibility for personal service. And no one can buy himself off, for the conscription is universal. We must each put our hand to this work as we have opportunity, and if we do not, we show ourselves ignorant or prove ourselves disobedient. Moreover, this policy of the spies was a policy of inconsistency. In adopting it Joshua fell from his own

model. He had begun in the spirit and was continuing in the flesh. The taking of Jericho was the pattern for faith to follow. What is the model set by God before His Church in the prosecution of the campaign of salvation? Without dispute, the Day of Pentecost. And what were the characteristics of that day? Unity of spirit, unity of labour. Likewise, this policy sprang from presumption. Joshua in listening to the advice of the spies acted according to the dictates of carnal wisdom. If all the people go against Ai they will tread on each other and be a hindrance rather than a help. If all the people quit the camp there will be a useless expenditure of energy. It is absurd to use 50,000 men when 5,000 are quite capable of doing the work. So they argued; and so the modern descendants of these wise spies say, "Not all the people." If all are engaged in this work, many mistakes will be made, much energy will be wasted, much folly will be wrought, much injury to the good cause will be done. What! Has not God ordained that all are to take part in this campaign? Let us take heed, then, lest in our wisdom we perchance become guilty of presumptuously opposing God, who has ordained by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. Certainly it is delightful to see zeal well directed, but any zeal for the good of souls is better than lethargy, indifference, death. Still further, this policy of the spies was a policy of infatuation. That Joshua entertained this proposal and acted on it was a sign that for the while he was left to himself on account of that sin which had defiled all Israel. Its unanimous adoption by the people (for both those who went to Ai and those who stayed in the camp signified their approval of it) was a clear token of the Divine displeasure, and brought its own punishment in the universal disgrace which followed. Thus does God often deal with men when they will not hearken to His voice. He makes them eat of the fruit of their own ways. May we ever be saved from such infatuation. Let us fall every one into the ranks of this great army of salvation. Let us buckle on the sword of the Spirit. Let us march to the attack on Satan's citadels with united front; and we also, like Israel, will divide the spoil and share the glory of the victory. III. God gave this command to Joshua in order TO TEACH A LESSON. Jericho was taken in one way, Ai in another: therefore methods may vary; they are not stereotyped, cast-iron rules, which cannot be altered. There are essential and there are non-essential elements in the mode of conducting the Divine work. It is essential that all God's people should take part in the work. All were employed at Jericho; all were to be employed at Ai. It is essential that there be organisation and arrangement. It was an army, not a rabble, which did the work at Jericho; so was it at Ai. But there are non-essentials also. There are great diversities of operation in this army of the Cross. God does not always act exactly in the same way. He has different modes of reaching the human heart and conscience in different ages, in different countries, and among different classes. What is suitable in one set of circumstances may be very unsuitable in another. (*A. B. Mackay.*) *The taking of Ai spiritualised*:—1. It appears, in the first place, that in going out to battle with anything that is doomed we must have a right character and a right cause. The Lord would not allow a blow to be struck at the city by a wicked hand; He will have judgment executed by righteousness; He will have the law proclaimed by lips that have been circumcised and anointed. The first great inquiry of man is a moral inquiry, not an inquest about numbers, places, and possible issues—but, "Is this thing right? and am I right who attempt to do the work?" That being the case, go forward. 2. The next great lesson of this incident is that we must all advance upon the doomed institution. When the idea of taking Ai was first broached, there were clever men in Israel who said, "Let two or three thousand of us go up and take the city." "I, and all the people that are with me, will approach unto the city" (ver. 5). That must be the rule of the Church in all its great moral wars. The battle is not to be handed over to a few persons, however skilful and zealous. The work of teaching the world and saving the world is a work committed to the whole Christian body. The living Church of the living God is one. When the Church realises its totality, when every man is part of an army and not an isolated warrior, then every Ai doomed of Heaven shall reel under the battering-ram which the Church will employ. There are to be no mere critics; there are to be thousands of active soldiers. 3. This being so, the incident brings before us in a very suggestive and picturesque manner the fact that we must excel the enemy in shrewdness. The Church is to be shrewder than the world, believers are to be keener of mind and more active in every energy than unbelievers. It is evident, moreover, that if we are to do any real work in the world in the name of God and

in the cause of Christ we must be about our business night and day. In ver. 10 we read, "And Joshua rose up early in the morning"; in ver. 13 we read, "Joshua went that night into the midst of the valley." How useful some men might be if they had the spirit of consecration: what time they have on hand! 4. We should miss one great lesson of this story if we did not note that we are bound to set fire to every devoted abomination. Ai was burned. We are not called to compromise, to paltering, to arranging, to expediency where ignorance is concerned, or slavery, or vice, or wrong. Things must be so burned down that they can never grow again. And after destruction, what then? Positive religion comes next: "Then Joshua built an altar unto the Lord God of Israel in Mount Ebal" (ver. 30). It is no use building your altar until you have burned the abomination. A great destructive work is to be done first, and in the doing of it, there will be great outcry about change, and novelty, and reprisal, and revolution. If you have not been faithful in the work of destruction, you cannot be faithful in the work of construction. It is lying unto the Holy Ghost to build an altar upon the basis of a rotten life. So we are called to thoroughness of work. There is to be no superficial action here. And after the altar, what? The law—the law of righteousness, the law of God. Ver. 32 reads, "And Joshua wrote there upon the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he wrote in the presence of the children of Israel." This is complete work—destruction, the erected altar, the inscribed law. This is healthy work. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Vers. 3–29. **So Joshua arose, and all the people of war.**—*All the people at work for Jesus:*—I. Consider THE ADVICE OF THE SPIES which led to such a shameful defeat (chap. vii. 3). 1. Here we shall have to deal with the error of supposing that a part only of the Church will be sufficient to perform the work of the whole. 2. In Joshua's day this error sprang up among the Israelites because, on account of their sins, God was displeased with them. When God is in the midst of a Church He guides its counsels and directs the hearts of men to go about His work in the wisest manner. Even upon the Lord's own people a measure of judicial blindness may come. You may depend upon it that when it becomes a doctrine that only special classes of men are to be expected to work in the Church there is some great wrong in the background. 3. Furthermore, this evil policy arose out of presumption engendered by success. The full sail needs much ballast, lest the boat be overset. We must be more sensible of weakness, more mindful that the conversion of souls is the work of Omnipotence, or we shall see but little done. We must ourselves believe more fully in the need of earnest work for God, and put forth all our strength, and strain every sinew for Him, knowing that it is His power that worketh in us mightily when we strive with all our hearts. 4. Let us not forget that these children of Israel were forgetting their commission and violating the command of God. As they all expected to have a dwelling-place in Canaan, so they were all expected to conquer the territory by their own exertions. They were all an enlisted host for God, and He never ordained that a part only should go forth in His great controversy with the condemned Canaanites. If we ever neglect to render universal service as a Church in the cause of Christ we shall depart from our trust and call, for the Lord has sent all His disciples to testify of Him and contend against sin. 5. These Israelites, in the new fashion which they were trying to set up, were departing from their own model. That model was, doubtless, the siege of Jericho. In that siege there was much dependence upon God, but there was no neglect of instrumentality; and, though all they did was to go round the city and shout, yet in so doing they were literally fulfilling orders, and doing all that was commanded. What, then, is our model as a Church? Is it not Pentecost? In that day did they not break bread from house to house, all of them? Did they not sell their lands and lay the price of them at the apostles' feet? Was there not a burning enthusiasm throughout the entire company of disciples? I suppose there is not one person present who heard that famous sermon by Matthew Wilks upon the universal service rendered by idolaters to their false gods, from the text, "The children gathered wood, and the fathers kindled the fire, and the women kneaded their dough to make cakes to the queen of heaven." The preacher's argument on that occasion was that which I would now press upon you, that all should take part in the work of the Lord. Distinct offices but united aims; diverse operations but the same spirit; many and yet one—so let it be. 6. Again, this error which we are carefully to avoid was no doubt the dictate of carnal wisdom. Spies were never of much use to Israel—two only of the first twelve were faithful—what

did Israel want with spies? Better far had it been to walk by faith. To Ai they must needs send spies instead of going up at once in the confidence of faith: evil came of it, for these spies counselled that only part of the people need labour up the hill. And the best ministers of Christ, worthy of all honour, would be the cause of great mischief if once their carnal wisdom should make them think that they can supersede primitive plans with wiser inventions. 7. These children of Israel, in sending to the war only part of the men were breaking in upon the Divine design. The Lord never intended to have two peoples, but one; and so we read that the Reubenites and the Gadites came over Jordan to the war, although their portion was already conquered. It was the Divine intent that they should be one army of the living God, each separate son of the seed of Abraham belonging to that army and fighting in it; He meant that not some only, but all should see the mighty works of His hand, working with them to overthrow their adversaries. I am sure it is so with the Church of God to-day. Our Lord means to keep all His chosen ones as one army, and to instruct them all as one band. And when are we most manifestly one? When we get to work. II. THE COMMAND THAT ALL ISRAEL SHOULD GO FORTH TO THE FIGHT: "Take all the men of war with thee." We must have all our Church members go to the war. We want to turn out the drones, and we need an increase of true working bees. How is it to be done? 1. We must be ourselves deeply impressed with the evil brought upon idle Christians by their idleness, and the evil which they bring upon the rest of the Church. Indolence is temptation. Certain of our Churches are suffering from unsound teaching, but they are suffering as much from want of work. The moss is growing upon them, the rust is eating them up; the gold becomes dim, the silver is losing its brightness, and all for want of use. 2. We need to be impressed with the mischief which idlers cause to others. One sickly sheep infects the flock; one member who does nothing lowers the tone of the whole body. The indolence of prominent professors is not merely the waste of their own labour, but of that of scores of others. Every man in an army who is not efficient and really serviceable is on the enemy's side. 3. Moreover, we must hunt out the sin which leads to the evil against which we contend, and I believe it is want of vital godliness in many cases. It is often the sin which grows out of too much ease, self-indulgence, and luxurious living. It seems as if the more God gives a man the less return he is inclined to offer. Whatever the secret sin of the Church may be, let us try to discover it, and then by the aid of the Holy Spirit endeavour to educate all our members to work for the Lord. 4. There must be a continual insisting upon the personal obligations of Christians. "What art thou doing for Christ?" is a question to be asked of all. No one must appear before the Lord empty, but either by active or passive service must prove his gratitude to God. And then, while each is responsible, neglect by one is injurious to the common service of the whole. I saw a cart standing this morning on the roadside with one wheel chained; there was no fear of its moving with that one wheel fast. Sometimes one chained wheel in a Church will hinder all. 5. Dwell upon the importance of the enterprise in which we are engaged; and so act as to make others feel its importance. We must make men feel that to save a soul is better than to possess all knowledge, or even to gain the whole world! While others are making a new gospel let us labour to save souls by the old one. 6. Above all, let us pray for more grace. Napoleon used to say, "Conquest has made me what I am, and conquest must maintain me"; and it is so with Christians. You must advance; you must outdo the exploits of the past, and eclipse the deeds of your sires, or you will show yourselves unworthy of them. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *United effort needed*:—In the days of chivalry a certain band of knights had never known defeat. In all battles their name was terrible to the foe. On their banners was emblazoned a long list of victories; but in an evil hour the leaders of the knights summoned them in chapter, and he said: "My brethren, we cause ourselves too much toil. Let the champions go alone. Yonder knight with his sword can cleave a man in twain at a single stroke, and his comrade can break a bar of iron with his axe; others among us are equally powerful, each one being a host in himself. With the terror of our name behind them, the chosen champions can carry on the war while the rest divide the spoil." The saying pleased the warriors well, but from that hour the knell of their fame was rung, and defeat defiled their standard. When they came together they complained of the champions because they had not sustained the honour of the order, and they bade them exert themselves more heroically. They did so, but with small success. Louder and louder were the notes of discontent and

the demands for new champions. Then one of the oldest of the knights said: "Brethren, why do you blame us? The mistake lies here. In the old time, when the enemy assailed us, a thousand men were up in arms, and we who led the van knew that a gallant army followed at our heels. But now you have made us solitary champions, and the adversary takes heart to defy us, finding us unsustained. Come you all with us to the fray as aforetime, and none shall stand against us." (*Ibid.*) *Work for God among the heathen:*—Let us each question his own heart as to the claims of the heathen: for my own part, I dare not sleep till I have honestly considered whether I ought to go or not. We tell our young men in the college that they must prove that they have not to go, or else their duty is clear. If some of the men of Israel had said to Joshua, "We cannot go to Ai," Joshua would have replied, "You must prove that you cannot go or you may not be excused." All other things being equal, ministers should take it for granted that it is their duty to invade new territory unless they can prove to the contrary. France is wanting the gospel. See what one beloved brother in Paris has been able to do—are there none who can do the like for other cities in that neighbour-country? Here and there a good man can say, "I have made a competency"—why not live and employ it where you can lay it out personally for the spread of the Redeemer's kingdom? Such a thing is being done by a few, it is not therefore impossible, and you who follow the grand example shall have your reward. See what Pastor Harms did in the village of Hermansburg, how he stirred up all the people until they gave themselves and their property to the Lord, and built a ship for the mission and went forth in it to Africa, company after company, to evangelise. Should it not be the ambition of a minister to feel that if he stays at home he will at least, by the Holy Spirit's help, produce missionaries by scores in the village where he labours? (*Ibid.*) **Ye shall lie in wait against the city.**—*Joshua's address to the soldiers of the expedition:*—I. JOSHUA'S OBEDIENCE. II. JOSHUA'S PRUDENCE. III. JOSHUA'S COURAGE. IV. JOSHUA'S FAITH. V. JOSHUA'S AUTHORITY. 1. The authority of all God-given words. 2. The authority of obedience. (*F. G. Marchant.*) *The victorious retreat:*—I. THERE IS SUCH A THING AS VICTORIOUS RETREAT. There are times in your life when the best thing you can do is to run. You were once the victim of strong drink. The glass and the decanter were your fierce foes. Your only safety is to get away from them. Your dissipating companions will come around you for your overthrow. Run for your life! Your retreat is your victory. Here is a converted infidel. He is so strong now in his faith in the gospel, he says he can read anything. What are you reading? Bolingbroke? Theodore Parker? Drop them and run. You will be an infidel before you die unless you quit that. Fly before they cut you with their swords and transfix you with their javelins. There are people who have been well-nigh ruined because they risked a foolhardy expedition in the presence of mighty and overwhelming temptations, and the men of Ai made a morning meal of them. So also there is such a thing as victorious defeat for the Church. Thousands of times the kingdom of Christ has seemed to fall back. When the Vaudois of France chose extermination rather than make an unchristian surrender, when on St. Bartholomew's day mounted assassins rode through the streets of Paris, crying, "Kill! Blood-letting is good in August! Kill! Death to the Huguenots! Kill!" When John Bunyan lay rotting in Bedford Jail, saying, "If God will help me, and my physical life continues, I will stay here until the moss grows on my eyebrows rather than give up my faith," the days of retreat for the Church were days of victory. But there is a more marked illustration of victorious retreat in the life of our Joshua, the Jesus of the ages. First falling back from an appalling height to an appalling depth, falling from celestial hills to terrestrial valleys, from throne to manger; yet that did not seem to suffice Him as a retreat. Falling back still further from Bethlehem to Nazareth, from Nazareth to Jerusalem, back from Jerusalem to Golgotha, back from Golgotha to the mausoleum in the rock, back down over the precipices of perdition, until He walked amid the caverns of the eternal captives and drank of the wine of the wrath of almighty God amid the Ahabs and the Jezebels and the Belshazzars. Oh, men of the pulpit and men of the pew, Christ's descent from heaven to earth does not measure half the distance! It was from glory to perdition. He descended into hell. All the records of earthly retreat are as nothing compared with this falling back. Santa Anna with the fragments of his army flying over the plateau of Mexico, and Napoleon and his army retreating from Moscow into the awful snows of Russia, are not worthy to be mentioned with this retreat when all the powers of

darkness seem to be pursuing Christ as He fell back, until the body of Him who came to do such wonderful things lay pulseless and stripped. But let not the powers of darkness rejoice quite so soon. Do you hear that disturbance in the tomb of Arimathea? I hear the sheet rending! What means that stone hurled down the side of the hill? Who is this coming out? Push Him back! The dead must not stalk in this open daylight. Oh, it is our Joshua! Let Him come out. He comes forth and starts for the city. He takes the spear of the Roman guard and points that way. Church militant marches up on one side and the Church triumphant marches down on the other side. And the powers of darkness being caught between these ranks of celestial and terrestrial valour, nothing is left of them save just enough to illustrate the direful overthrow of hell and our Joshua's eternal victory. II. THE TRIUMPH OF THE WICKED IS SHORT. Did you ever see an army in a panic? There is nothing so uncontrollable. If you had stood at Long Bridge, Washington, during the opening of our unfortunate war, you would know what it is to see an army run. And when those men of Ai looked out and saw those men of Joshua in a stampede, they expected easy work. They would scatter them as the equinox the leaves. Oh, the gleeful and jubilant descent of the men of Ai upon the men of Joshua! But their exhilaration was brief, for the tide of battle turned, and these quondam conquerors left their miserable bodies in the wilderness of Bethaven. So it always is. The triumph of the wicked is short. Call over the roll of bad men who prospered, and see how short was their prosperity. III. HOW MUCH MAY BE ACCOMPLISHED BY LYING IN AMBUSH FOR OPPORTUNITIES. Are you hypercritical of Joshua's manœuvre? Do you say that it was cheating for him to take that city by ambuscade? Was it wrong for Washington to kindle camp-fires on New Jersey Heights, giving the impression to the opposing force that a great army was encamped there when there was none at all? I answer, if the war was right then Joshua was right in his stratagem. He violated no flag of truce. He broke no treaty, but by a lawful ambuscade captured the city of Ai. Oh, that we all knew how to lie in ambush for opportunities to serve God! The best opportunities do not lie on the surface, but are secreted; by fact, by stratagem, by Christian ambuscade, you may take almost any castle of sin for Christ. Come up towards men with a regular besiegement of argument, and you will be defeated; but just wait until the door of their hearts is set ajar, or they are off their guard, or their severe caution is away from home, and then drop in on them from a Christian ambuscade. There has been many a man up to his chin in scientific portfolios which proved there was no Christ and no Divine revelation, his pen a scimetar flung into the heart of the theological opponents, who, nevertheless, has been discomfited and captured for God by some little three-year-old child who has got up and put her snowy arms around his sinewy neck and said, "Papa, why don't you love Jesus?" Oh, make a flank movement; steal a march on the devil; cheat that man into heaven! Do not rub a man's disposition the wrong way. Do not take the imperative mood when the subjunctive mood will do just as well. You can take any man for Christ if you know how to get at him. Do not send word to him that to-morrow at ten o'clock you propose to open your batteries upon him, but come on him by a skilful, persevering, God-directed ambuscade. IV. THE IMPORTANCE OF TAKING GOOD AIM. There must be some signal—a signal to stop the one division and to start the other. Joshua, with a spear on which were ordinarily hung the colours of battle, points towards the city. He stands in such a conspicuous position, and there is so much of the morning light dripping from that spear-tip, that all around the horizon they see it. It was as much as to say: "There is the city. Take it. Take it now. Roll down from the west side. Surge up from the north side. It is ours, the city of Ai." God knows and we know that a great deal of Christian attack amounts to nothing simply because we do not take good aim. Nobody knows, and we do not know ourselves, which point we want to take, when we ought to make up our minds what God will have us to do, and point our spear in that direction, and then hurl our body, mind, soul, time, eternity, at that one target. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *Variety of Divine means:*—Jericho was taken by the power of God; this was to be by the stratagem of His people. "Lay thee an ambush for the city behind it." The designs of Jehovah engage a diversity of means and operation as may best promote the ends of His infinite wisdom. It had been equally as easy to have taken this city without hands, and to have caused its fenced walls to have yielded to invisible operation, as those of Jericho; but then the courage of faith had not been exercised in His people, nor had the conquest of their enemies, now exulting, been so striking and instructive. The achievements

of the Lord's people are all of Him, whether effected by the measures of force or of artifice. (*W. Seaton.*) **Joshua drew not his hand back, wherewith he stretched out the spear, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai.**—*The outstretched spear*:—A spear outstretched, outstretched by Divine command, outstretched till the doom of Ai was sealed—what means it? I. IT WAS THE SIGNAL OF PRUDENCE. Plans had been carefully prepared for the capture of Ai, and that spear, probably with a pennon hanging from its head like the weapon of the Lancers, was a pre-arranged signal for the carrying out of these plans. The outstretched spear would have been useless, meaningless, apart from the plans to which it referred. But it was most important when these are taken into consideration. In the great war we wage against evil within and without, God desires us to use all the appliances of wisdom and prudence. How wary is the fisher as he angles on the stream, taking advantage of every bush and tuft of grass, of every passing cloud and gentle ripple; and the more the waters are fished the more wary and ingenious is he. Oh, for a holy ingenuity, a sanctified sagacity in winning souls! Oh, that the dictates of prudence were more faithfully carried out in the sanctification of the soul! II. IT WAS THE SIGN OF OBEDIENCE. While much was left to human prudence, certain Divine principles clearly laid down must not be traversed. Joshua must not in every respect do as he pleased. There was a circle within which wisdom might have free and full play, but beyond that circle he dared not go at his peril. But not only was there a general obedience to this Divine command, there was also a very special and definite act of obedience in connection with the outstretched spear. Joshua did not do this when he pleased, but waited patiently till he got a clear intimation of the Divine will that the time had come for striking the decisive blow. Thus Joshua's act in stretching out the spear was well-timed. We need the same patient and punctual obedience which Joshua manifested. We must not be like the horse, going before, or the mule lagging behind, and therefore requiring the bit and the bridle of God's providences. We must not be like Moses, who when he was forty was too fast, and when he was eighty was too slow, to obey the Divine command. Let us be like Joshua here, led by the eye of God to a well-timed obedience. III. IT WAS ALSO A SIGNAL OF ATTACK. Its waving pennon cried to those in ambush, "Up and at them!" It called to those who were retreating, "Turn and smite!" And it shouted to all of them, "Retrieve your lost honour, win back your laurels." How many deeds of daring were the answer to that signal. Every common soldier in Israel was a hero that day, a noble brother of the man who waved that spear aloft. Oh, for like courage and energy in the wars of the Lord, for noble deeds done against deadly sins! IV. IT WAS ALSO THE MARK OF CONFIDENCE. He did not think because he had once failed that he would fail again. He had no foreboding of defeat. Not with nervous, trembling, fearful hand did he hold it aloft, but with the firm, sure grasp of perfect confidence. From the vantage-ground on which he stood, he ordered the fight, as again an assured victor. Thus should we engage in the war to which we are called—with sublime confidence, sure of victory, aye, even after we have experienced defeat. So should it be in the inner fight, for He who has begun the good work will perfect that which concerns us to the praise of His glorious grace. And so should it be in the outer. Never let us dishearten ourselves or our neighbours with the thought that we are fighting a losing battle. The very idea is blasphemous; as if man or the devil, or both, were stronger than the Almighty. V. IT MAY BE ALSO LOOKED UPON AS A MEMORIAL OF MERCY. As certainly as Amalek fled before the Lord's hosts, so certainly will the men of Ai. Victory is sure. In the spiritual warfare how stimulating is it to bring to mind past victories; to remember how David and Paul, Luther, Calvin, and Knox, Wesley, Whitefield, and McCheyne, wrestled with evil and prevailed. But above all, the remembrance of hard-won victories in our own experience is pre-eminently fitted to encourage. VI. IT WAS THE SYMBOL OF PERSEVERANCE. No doubt Joshua remembered how the battle with Amalek swayed forward and backward as the rod of Moses was elevated or depressed; and this perhaps explains the fact that he never drew back the spear till the work was finished. As if his hand had been glued to that spear he held it aloft, and thus he urged his soldiers to look like himself to the God of Sabaoth, who alone giveth victory. We have seen the battle well begun, with prudence and obedience, courage and confidence. See it nobly continued and ended with stubborn perseverance. Oh, for such a spirit in the fight of faith! Alas! how few endure to the end. VII. IT WAS ALSO THE OMEN OF DOOM. It hung over Ai like the great sword of the angel over Jerusalem. And it is worthy of notice that these men were

not without resources. They showed great zeal and enthusiasm in defending their city, rising early to go out to fight. They also displayed far greater courage than the men of Jericho, for they marched against overwhelming odds. They also showed considerable wisdom in acting on the offensive, and not waiting to be attacked like their neighbours. It was also plain that they believed that union was strength, for they got the men of Bethel to unite their forces with theirs in the attack on Joshua. They also had great confidence in their success, emboldened as they were by their previous victory. They had all these qualities, good in themselves, but all useless because on the wrong side. The all-important question is, On which side are you? Are you on the wrong side? Then cast down your weapons of rebellion. "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little." Are you on the right side? Then "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life." (*A. B. Mackay.*)

Vers. 30, 31. **Then Joshua built . . . an altar of whole stones.**—*The plastered altar*:—Let us behold in the story of Joshua's altar in Mount Ebal the mirror of an honest Christian life. 1. It is well to recognise the fact that this world is under the curse, a true Mount Ebal. Is human existence hard? There is sunshine in life, it is true, but think of the shadows. Go into the houses of the rich, where luxury meets you on every hand. In this mansion the servants go about with noiseless tread; the street in front is thickly strewn with tan bark; often at the door is seen the physician's carriage. Is it a happy household? Enter the next mansion. Here, too, wealth is supreme, everything of the costliest, but the face of the father of the family is clouded with anger, and the mother's eyes are red with weeping. What is the trouble? Shame, dishonour; a child has fouled a parent's noble name, disgraceful deeds have made the son and heir of a great house a byword and a hissing. But thank God there is Mount Gerizim as well as Ebal; the blessings are as rich as the curses are deplorable, and the curses come first, only to give place to the blessings. We may not forget, however, that the great heart altar for God is to be set up in Ebal, in the consciousness of the power of the curse. The first thought we ought to have in our Christian life is that Christ hath redeemed us from the curse. 2. Well, then, Christian, saved by Christ's blood from wrath to come, rear up to thy Lord and Master thine altar. Of what sort shall we make it? The altar in the heart must be of whole stones upon which no man hath lift up any iron. I suppose that no metal enters into our life to the extent that iron does in its myriad forms of using. Is its cold hardness not an appropriate symbol of human selfishness, the occasion of all strife and quarrelling, hatred, and crime? Is there any one who lives his life on earth unselfishly, who is not concerned more with his own interests than with those of his neighbours? If the secret of the worthy heart altar as towards God be humble acquiescence in the Divine ordering of things, the secret of it as towards men is genuine unselfishness. Towards God the "whole" stones, unfashioned by our wilfulness, towards man stones piled up with no help of iron, but erected in brotherly love, self-forgetting generosity. 3. When Joshua had set up the great cairn, he plastered it all over with plaster, that he might engrave thereon the words of the law. In this way the separate stones, without having been fashioned or fitted together by human hand and tool, were in a certain sort made one through human agency. There is a strange factor in our life which is indeed given more than its rightful share of importance in most earthly things, while in the Divine service it seems to be hardly enlisted at all. I mean the purpose or the will. As the plaster covered all those rough stones and gave them a smooth, well-compacted surface, so does a firm and well-set will, a steadfast heart-purpose, make the unhewn circumstances of our lives homogeneous, a shapely altar for the Lord's use. God's law has been revealed in order that we may obey it, and we have no other guide to duty. The end of the Christian life, in the world at least, is obedience. To believe not what we think reasonable, but what God has said; to do not what seems edifying, but what He has enjoined. 4. Thus are we, every one of us, if we be in earnest, raising up altars in our hearts, as we go on through this world; gathering up one by one the circumstances and opportunities of our lives. Great, rough, ill-shaped stones they seem, yet we may not think to trim and fashion them to our own notion, nor to hew them out with iron tools of selfishness and pride. Lay them up, O soul, in a cairn, as they come, plaster them all over with devout purpose and zealous will, then write on them the law of God, that it may be the guiding principle of all thy thoughts and words and deeds, His will not thine own. (*Arthur Ritchie.*)

Vers. 32-35. **Gerizim . . . Ebal.**—*Ebal and Gerizim*:—The valley between these two is one of the most beautiful in Palestine. Jacob's well lies at its mouth, and all its luxuriant extent is covered with its verdant beauty of gardens, and orchards, and olive groves, rolling in waves of billowy beauty up to the walls of Shechem, whilst the murmur of brooks flowing in all directions fills the air. The width of the valley is about a third of a mile, though the summits of the two mountains, in the lap of which it lies, are two miles apart. It is remarkable that where the two mountains face each other and touch most closely, with a green valley of five hundred yards between, each is hollowed out, and the limestone stratum of each is broken into a succession of ledges, "so as to present the appearance of a series of regular benches." Thus a natural amphitheatre is formed, capable of containing a vast audience of people; and the acoustic properties are so perfect in that dry and rainless air that Canon Tristram speaks of two of his party taking up positions on the opposite mountains, reciting the ten commandments antiphonally, and hearing each other perfectly. I. THE ALTAR ON EBAL. Ebal was stern and barren in its aspect. There was a congruity, therefore, between its appearance and the part it played in the solemn proceedings of the day. For far up its slopes gathered the dense masses of the six tribes, who, with thunderous amens, twelve times repeated, answered the voices of the band of white-robed Levites, as standing with Joshua, and the elders, and officers, and judges, in the green valley, they solemnly repeated the curses of the law. But that was not the first proceeding in that holy ceremonial. Before the people took up their assigned places on the mountain sides an altar was reared on the lower slopes of Ebal. As we pass into the land of promise we must be watchful that we do not leave behind the devout and loving consideration of that precious blood by which we have been redeemed and which is our life. Our highest and most rapturous experiences can never take the place of this. Constantly we must remind ourselves and others that we are redeemed sinners, and that all our hopes of salvation, our fellowship with God, our motives for service, are derived from what our Saviour did when He bore our sins in His own body on the tree. But because He died there, we need never stand there. Because He counted not His life dear to Himself, those gaunt and forbidding slopes have become the scene of blessed communion with God. We sit and feast with Him, and from peak to peak the joy chases the terrors of the curse, and smiles look out on us from the old rocks, whilst the torrents tinged with the light of the sun flash and sing. II. THE LAW IN CANAAN. Around the altar strong men reared great stones, and plastered them with a facing of cement, composed of lime and gypsum, on which it was easy to write all the words of the law very plainly (Deut. xxvii. 8). In that dry air, where there is no frost to split and disintegrate, such inscriptions, written on the soft cement with a stencil, or on its polished surface, when dry, with ink or paint, as in the case of the monumental stones of Egypt, would remain for centuries. As the time could not have admitted of the inscription of the whole law, it is probable that the more salient points were alone committed to the custody of those great cromlechs to perpetuate to after generations the conditions of the tenure on which Israel held the lease of Palestine. They were a standing protest against the sins which had blighted those fertile valleys, and an incentive to the obedience on which so much of the future hinged. The case is this: when we yield ourselves entirely to the Spirit of life which is in Christ Jesus, and which passes freely through us, as the blood through artery and vein, He makes us very sensitive to the least commandment or desire of Him whom He has taught us to love; we dread to see the shadow of suffering pass over His face more than to feel the pang of remorse rend our hearts; we find our heaven in His smile of approval, and the "Well done!" that glistens in His eyes when we have done aught to the least of His; we are conscious of the pulse of a love which He has instilled, and which supplies us with the highest code for life—and so insensibly, whilst we yield ourselves to Him, we find ourselves keeping the law after a fashion which was foreign to us when it was a mere outward observance, and we cry with David, "Oh, how I love Thy law, it is my meditation all the day." III. THE CONVOCATION. It is well worth our while to ponder the list of blessings appended to obedience in that memorable twenty-eighth chapter of Deuteronomy, that we may discover their spiritual counterparts, and, having found them, to claim them. Let us, first, be quite sure that we are right with God; next, that we are on His plan and doing His will; also, thirdly, that we are set upon His glory, altogether irrespective of our own interests; and we shall find ourselves able to claim blessings of which we little dreamt. The Lord will open His good treasury in

heaven and make us plenteous for good, and establish us for an holy people unto Himself. (*F. B. Meyer, M.A.*) *Ebal and Gerizim*:—I. WHERE WE GO. We go to a distant place; about a week's journey from Gilgal. Why do we go there? To take some strong fortress? To fight some great battle? No, but to worship Jehovah, and to take formal possession of the land in His name. But it is a formidable thing to move all the host of Israel so far as that. It is; but no trouble is too great that serves to show our loyalty to Jehovah. What a reproof is this to those whose religion costs them nothing! who seek to serve God with the miserable fag-ends of time—the odd intervals of a busy life, or the poor dregs of the evil days of nature's decay. There is no fear of any man's temporal interests suffering by due attention to the spiritual. Turning again to Israel, we notice that they went to a dangerous place. Why march a company of religious worshippers to that distant valley, instead of a mighty army to destroy every foe? Surely prompt action, preventing their enemies from amalgamating their forces, is their only policy. Nay, to wait on God is better. Man is only weak when he disobeys. And they go to an appointed place. This makes the march wise and profitable. This journey had a special bearing on the formal possession of the land in Jehovah's name. From being defiled Canaan, resting under God's curse, it is to become the inheritance of Jehovah, the holy land which He delights to bless. As Noah's first act was to take possession of the new world in the name of God, so at the first opportunity Joshua took possession of Canaan in Jehovah's name. Still further, this was an appropriate place to which Israel marched. It was appropriate, whether we consider its past associations or look at its position in the land. It was here that Abraham, the father of Israel, built his first altar in the land that God had promised. What more appropriate, then, than that his children should first come here, and as inheritors of his faith and piety, as well as of his promise, rear their altar and worship the unchanging Jehovah? It was here that Jacob bought ground and dug a well which remains to this day, leaving it in faith a heritage to his children's children. And here they come, the possessors of all that was promised; their feet shall stand on this earnest of the inheritance; they and their little ones and their flocks shall drink of their father's well. This rendezvous was also appropriate because it was so central and so beautiful. Mahomed called it the fairest spot on earth; and many have named it the paradise of the Holy Land. No greater contrast could be conceived than that presented by the scenery of Mount Sinai, where the law was first given, and that of Ebal and Gerizim, where it was repeated. The former is stern, still, and forbidding, without speck of green or sign of life. This is smiling and verdant, vocal with the songs of innumerable birds, laden with the fatness of the olive, the sweetness of the fig, the luscious richness of the vine—the most inviting spot the heart of man can conceive. Here the traveller, enchanted by the indescribable air of tranquillity and repose which hang over the scene, pitches his tent beside the purling and pellucid rills, and however anxious to renew his journey, feels he would gladly linger days and weeks in such a paradise. Such is it even now, as described by those whose eyes have rested on it—what must it have been in those days of Joshua? II. WHAT WE SEE. First of all we behold the ark, as conspicuously prominent as on the day that Israel crossed the Jordan. The Holy Presence of which the ark speaks has never failed them, has never forsaken them. We also behold an altar here. The altar is for the ark. The blood of the one sprinkles the mercy-seat of the other, and thus sin is purged; God can dwell among the people, and say to the sinful, "There will I meet with thee." This altar was constructed of rough stones, untouched by any instrument of iron, and therefore spoke of the work of Christ as divinely finished, requiring not any addition or improvement that man's wisdom could suggest or man's skill accomplish. This altar was pitched on Ebal, the loftier height, from which the curses came. There it was set to remove the curse; for apart from the sacrifice of the altar which God has provided all flesh are under the curse of the law. On this altar were offered up burnt-offerings and peace-offerings. The burnt-offerings spoke of Christ offered to God, a sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savour; yielding a perfect and glorious obedience to all that law which He thus magnified and made honourable. The peace-offering spoke of Christ as the centre and substance of rest, delight, and refreshment to God and man; the glorious means whereby communion is restored and maintained. God and man delight in the same sacrifice, are sharers in the same feast. Thus the ark and the altar, the Holy Presence and the Perfect Sacrifice, guarantee to Israel all the glory of God's inheritance. Behold the imposing scene. The elders of the tribes stand with Joshua and Eleazar and the

priests in the centre of the valley beside the ark. The tribes stretch outward, like two dark wings, on either side in compact masses. Then, when all were in their places and solemn silence reigned, the Levites read aloud the curses of the law, and the men on Ebal responded with a deep amen, like the sound of many waters. Again the clear notes of the Levites rise as they recite the blessings, and like the sound of harpers harping with their harps comes the joyous amen from the slopes of Gerizim. But there is still another object for our eyes to rest upon. As a lasting monument of that great event, Joshua put up great stones on Mount Ebal, plastered with plaster, and having written upon them "a copy of the law of Moses." The altar spoke of what the Holy Presence in Israel bestowed. These stones spoke of what this Holy Presence demanded. The stones on Jordan's bank spoke of Jehovah's gracious power. The stones of Jericho declare His judgment. The stones of Achor speak of His discipline. The stones of Ai tell His faithfulness. The stones of Ebal are witnesses of His holiness. They tell what is becoming in the people whose God is the Lord. They hold up the standard whereby His people are to walk. Has this standard changed? Are its precepts binding still, or have they become antiquated? Are these ten words the Christian's standard and rule of life? It is a vain morality, it is a false spirituality, which dreams that it can rise above obedience to the law. (*A. B. Mackay.*) **He read all the words of the law.**—*The reading of the law:*—I. THE FITNESS OF MARKING LIFE'S CHANGES BY A SPECIAL RECOGNITION OF DEPENDENCE UPON GOD AND OBLIGATION TO HIM. With Israel it was a time of transition, involving triumph, gain, a new and long-desired possession. At such times, men of the world are apt to think only of themselves and their good fortune. It was not so with Israel. This is their first pause on entering the promised land. And they trust God to protect them, while they use it to own Him as having brought them thither. With solemn ceremony they put themselves afresh into covenant relations with Him. Supposing ourselves to be changing our residence or occupation, to be entering a new place or state of responsibility, to be keeping a birthday or other anniversary—how becoming it would be to make it a time of re-dedication to God! So of a youth passing from school to business, entering the marriage state, going out from the old home, and taking up for himself a life's work. Our religious faith should make it natural to do this. II. THE VALUE OF SPECIAL MEANS TO DEEPEN THE SENSE OF OBLIGATION TO GOD. There are such ordinary means as the daily reading of the Bible, attendance on the public ordinances of God's house, Christian conversation, giving heed to the voices of conscience and the Divine Spirit. Many things remind us of duty and dependence. And yet it is easy to forget. Ordinary means lose a measure of their power, save as they are reinforced now and then by those that are special and extraordinary. It was once more common than we fear it now is for persons entering the Christian life to do it with a solemnly-written covenant, to be recalled and renewed in after months and years. Other occasions were signalised in a similar way. On the day of the birth of the late Dr. Bethune, his father solemnly dedicated him to God in writing—an act more than once repeated. Churches have had their times of renewing covenant vows by rising in a mutual pledge to each other, and a common re-dedication to God. I have seen the record of "an holy covenant entered into, and renewed with God, by ye Church of Christ in concord, upon a day of fasting and prayer, set apart for that purpose, July 11, 1776," bearing the signature of Rev. William Emerson (then pastor) and sixty-one others. Religious revivals have been begun and prolonged by such means. Piety that is from the heart readily approves them. It makes glad use, not only of common, but of special, helps to fidelity and growth in godly living. III. THE WISDOM OF HEEDING ALL GOD HAS TOLD US OF OUR OBLIGATION TO HIM, AND OF THE PERIL OF CASTING IT OFF. Joshua "read all the words of the law, the blessings and cursings." Just what things were included in the inscription on the stones and in the reading we are not told. Doubtless, at least, the substance and sanctions of the law. It is clear that there was no self-pleasing discrimination in favour of the easy and agreeable commands, nor yet in the singling-out of the blessings and the rejection of the cursings. IV. THE MISTAKE OF WITHHOLDING ANY PART OF GOD'S LAW FROM ANY AGE OR CLASS. "All Israel, and their elders and officers, and their judges, stood on this side the ark, and on that side." None were so great and wise that they had no need to be present. And "there was not a word of all that Moses commanded which Joshua read not," &c. It is sometimes thought that the great and sober things of God's law are not to be taught to children. "Set before them only the bright things," it is said. How strange that it is so much easier to be wise in earthly things than in the

heavenly! In this world's affairs, we teach the child to foresee that which is evil, that he may hide himself. We remember, too, that great souls are never nurtured on the ostrich plan. The ostrich thrusts his head into the sand, shuts his eyes, and, seeing no peril, says, "Now I am safe!" This is not God's way. The "little ones" were to hear "all that Moses commanded." They might comprehend little. They would feel much. Through the imagination, their souls would be filled with abiding, restraining, and uplifting awe. V. THE POSSIBILITY OF A SERENE CONTEMPLATION OF GOD'S LAW AND REMEMBRANCE OF OUR PAST UNFAITHFULNESS TO IT. First of all, before he ventured to read the law, "Joshua built an altar," &c. On this altar, burnt-offerings and peace-offerings were to be presented. The burnt-offering signified self-surrender, entire devotement to God; the peace-offering, joyful communion with Him. Thus the people came face to face with law and penalty, not as aliens, but as friends; their sins expiated and pardoned; their persons, powers, and possessions made over to Him to be wholly His; their hearts at rest in the gladdening sense of His favour. To such the law could be nothing other than a blessed, Divine rule. So it may be with us. (*Sermons by the Monday Club.*)

CHAPTER IX.

VERS. 1, 2. The kings . . . on this side Jordan . . . gathered themselves together.—*A Canaanitish league*:—I. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THIS LEAGUE. 1. It was very wide, embracing every tribe in Canaan, those of the hills as well as those of the plain, and those of the sea coast as well as those inland. Even so has it been in all ages. Men of all ranks and occupations can be found to sneer at, condemn, and crush if they could, the pure gospel. 2. It was very singular. Strange elements were brought together on this occasion. A common danger, a common enemy, a common hate, makes them forget old feuds, bury the war-hatchet, and unite on common ground for a common object. Who ever hated each other more cordially than Pharisee and Sadducee? yet they united in crying, "Crucify Him," and in compassing His death. Pilate and Herod cemented their broken friendship with His blood. 3. It was spontaneous. No pressure was employed to gather the clans together; none was needed. On every side there sprang up a desire to take united action. It is a sad and a terrible fact that the deepest thing in the natural heart is enmity against God. Every sinner is potentially a Deicide. 4. It was crafty. The wisest heads in Canaan were here drawn together, and engaged in strengthening this league. Their most skilful diplomatists, their most wily warriors, would give their advice, and seek to help the league in every way. The rich would give of their substance, the poor would give their strength, the wise would use their wits in discussing and arranging plans; and thus by their united energy all might yet be well. Thus again and again has all man's wisdom been brought to bear against the purposes of God. 5. And who could deny that such a league was powerful? It was powerful because of all the accumulated experience and wisdom that could be brought to bear upon the work; because of the minute knowledge of the country which the common people as well as the leaders possessed; and because of the immense resources they could fall back upon. 6. And it is also very plain that this league was heartily, yea, even enthusiastically, entered into. Like the great sea billows they rage against this bark, and with implacable wrath would smite and overwhelm it. Alas, frail bark! Alas, poor Israel! what canst thou do against such a league, so wild, so strange, so spontaneous, so crafty, so powerful, so zealous? II. THE OCCASION OF THIS LEAGUE. No doubt many things contributed to bring it about, but one thing is specially singled out and mentioned by the Holy Ghost in this connection. When they heard of that strange march and the solemn ceremony in the vale of Shechem, then they gathered themselves together to fight with Joshua and with Israel with one accord. This shows that these Canaanites understood something of the significance of this action. They interpreted it rightly as an act of dispossession, so far as they were concerned. How often does the pious devotion of God's people provoke and exasperate the unrighteous above everything else! The sinner hates above all things the holiness of the saint, because it is his most emphatic condemnation. Perfect surrender to God's will always brings the enmity of the world to a head. Would you learn the

true spirit of the world? March to Ebal and Gerizim, and pitch your tent in that sacred and fruitful vale of utter consecration. But if such a life as this stirs up of necessity the evil which reigns in the heart of man, it is also to be remembered that such a life alone is powerful to do good to man or bring glory to God. Who can measure the strength of such consecrated souls? John Wesley knew something of this when he said, "Give me ten men who hate sin only and love God only, and I will shake the gates of hell." Its enmity will be roused, even as that of the Canaanites by the consecration of Israel; but it will be roused, only like theirs, to be utterly broken. III. THE PURPOSE OF THIS LEAGUE. They banded themselves together "to fight against Joshua and against Israel." Though great wonders have been wrought before their very eyes, they will oppose this people. Therefore their action cannot for a moment be classed with the resistance which, *e.g.*, the Britons offered to the invading Romans under Cæsar. The position of these Canaanites was altogether different. In fighting against Israel they deliberately set themselves against Israel's God, Jehovah. They knowingly pit the strength of their idols against that of the Lord of hosts. At Him they aim their shafts through His people. Earth loves not its rightful Monarch. It rebels against His edicts, it cleaves to the great usurper's sway. What daring rebellion have we here! men plotting under God's very eyes. Conspirators usually meet in secret, in the darkness of night, screened from the eye and sheltered from the hand of the power outraged; but here these sinners gather together openly, to take counsel against Him who is marching through their land in awful majesty. Oh, hardened soul, remember the only alternatives. Bend or break; turn or burn. What utter futility have we here? Could we conceive anything more useless, more inefficient, more foolish, more powerless, than this league? The only consequence to these leaguers will be their own ruin. For this they plot, and not in vain. It comes upon them as a whirlwind, certain, irresistible, terrible, complete, irretrievable. IV. THE LESSONS OF THIS LEAGUE. Surely, to begin with, we are very plainly taught that the people of God in carrying out the purposes of God may count upon opposition. It always has been so; and it will be so to the very end, for we read that even the glorious millennium is ushered in with a terrible struggle. We are apt to get downhearted when we see the hosts of evil mustering on every side. We exclaim, "What can the poor Church of God do?" If she can do nothing more, she can look up. She can see a sight which can calm all her fears, and make her laugh to scorn her loudest foes. Look up, then! look up! See Him who sitteth on the circle of the heavens, and before whom the nations are as grasshoppers. God is keeping silence. God is having them in derision. The attacks which to us may seem formidable are to Him despicable. Let us therefore have good hope. The systems of corruption and error and oppression, however well compacted and widely organised, must in the long run be destroyed, and he who expects and prays and works for their downfall will not be disappointed. Let us look back when we are despondent and faint-hearted, and remember how often God has restrained the wrath of the enemy; how often, when iniquity was coming in as a flood, He has raised up a standard against it. Yea, look around, and see what God has wrought. Think of the diffusion of Christianity, and of its mighty influence, whether direct or indirect. But we may learn another lesson from this league. We may learn as the host of God to unite our forces more and more in prosecuting the work set before us. (*A. B. Mackay.*)

Vers. 3–27. **The inhabitants of Gibeon . . . did work wilily.**—*A Canaanitish stratagem:*—I. HOW THIS DEVICE ORIGINATED. 1. Their wisdom suggested it. The selfsame facts suggest different courses of action to the Canaanites and to the Gibeonites. These events led the great majority to unite their forces against Joshua; they led this Gibeonitish minority to see if they could not come to terms with this irresistible foe. There was no sense whatever in the counsels of the kings. They ought to have assembled in a lunatic asylum, for their wisest counsels were but the ravings of a maniac. There is a spark of wisdom in the craft of the republican Gibeonites. They do come to a wise decision when they resolve to bear anything rather than provoke God against them by vain resistance. Let us, like them, humble ourselves before God's irresistible might. It is our only wisdom. There is no use waiting till judgment is at the door; no use staying till our souls are besieged by sickness and death: "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation." 2. The fears of these Gibeonites also stimulated them, were a spur to their wisdom. Was the conduct of the Gibeonites ignoble? Our hearts always

side with the man who against overwhelming odds fights with grim consistency a losing battle, who resolves to "Perish if it must be so; at bay, destroying many a foe." But here again we must not lose sight of the religious element which was uppermost in the mind of all. It can never be right for the subject to rise against lawful authority. It can never be ignoble to throw down our weapons of rebellion and fall at the feet of the All-wise, the All-gracious, and the Almighty. 3. Also, there was faith at the bottom of this movement. It may readily be allowed that it was very small; microscopical, infinitesimal, if you choose. It may also be granted that it was also overlaid with error, guile, and selfishness. Yet notwithstanding all these things faith was there. These Gibeonites did believe that the purpose of God would come to pass. They did believe that God desired to give Israel the land, and that He was able to do so. With what mixed motives do we give up our rebellion and fall at the feet of Jesus! Can they bear full scrutiny? Are we pleased with them? I trow not. When we look back and analyse our thoughts and feelings, can we not discover a large leaven of mixed motives? Accordingly, there is here much encouragement to all. You ask, "Is my faith of the right kind?" See. If faith of this miserable description finds grace, who need despair? Perhaps our motives will not bear close examination; perhaps it is true that it is a selfish thing to fear hell; that it is nothing more than a hangman's whip. But if that whip lashes us to the feet of Jesus, and works for us salvation, we shall bless God for it for ever. II. How this plan was prosecuted. Anything is fair in war, so men say; and anything is fair in diplomacy, so men have believed in past ages. It need not surprise us, then, that these Gibeonites followed the universal rule. They show their craft both by what they did and by what they hid. They were no novices in the art of deceit. They also prosecuted their commission very courageously. The coolness and audacity of these men are marvellous. They must have had strong nerves, a great command over themselves, and a deep knowledge of human nature. These men were neither fools nor cowards after all. III. How their stratagem succeeded. It succeeded to perfection. Their audacity, cunning, and knowledge of human nature were all conspicuous in this transaction, and served them well. The weakness of the Israelites helped to bring about the same result. It is one thing to be rudely suspicious, it is another thing to be over-credulous. But practically how often are men at a loss how to decide when placed in similar circumstances! Therefore we should not blame Israel too severely, but rather remember that the best cure either for over-credulity or over-caution is communion with God and distrust in self. The men of Israel are also very self-conscious. Pride had something to do with their decision to take these strangers under their protection. They felt honoured and flattered by the supposed circumstances which made them a centre of universal attraction. Would you be an instrument in the hands of another, a pipe producing just such notes as the player pleases, think much of yourself; give yourself out to be some great one; open your ears and give up your heart to the sweet blandishments of flattering lips. Contrariwise remember that the humblest soul is the most independent. The Israelites were also very self-confident, and this exposed them to the wiles of these schemers. No step that we take in life is too trivial to be made a matter of prayer. Only as we do so, consulting with God about everything, are we guided by His eye. Here the Israelites put right questions—"Who are you?" "Whence come you?" But sufficient care was not taken to sift the answer and see if it was true. "All is not gold that glitters." Much ancient armour is manufactured all the year round at Birmingham. Not a few ancient statues are made to order in Italy in these days, and sold to innocent connoisseurs. Even so is it in things spiritual. The wolves are very clever at fitting themselves with sheep's clothing; the make-up is often particularly ingenious. Let the Israel of God take heed "to the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this Word it is because there is no light in them." And we should apply this also to the affairs of every-day life. How often do we involve ourselves in difficulties, hedge up our way with troubles, lead ourselves into danger, because we "ask not counsel at the mouth of the Lord." We give a listening ear to plausible representations; we hurry headlong into inviting schemes; we enter heedlessly into doubtful connections without weighing the consequences or looking for Divine direction. But sooner or later we discover that no business, or engagement, or union can prosper without the counsel and approbation of the Lord; and often with shame and sorrow we have to seek His face to undo the evils which our own rashness and unfaithfulness have brought upon us. But in considering this matter our view would be very superficial did we not look higher than man and

his motives. The purpose of Jehovah had also to do with the result. Why did He allow Joshua to be thus deceived? To teach him and Israel a valuable lesson? No doubt; but it was also for the purpose of manifesting to all that He was not unwilling to show mercy to the very chief of sinners. If with all their guile and crooked policy He spared these Gibeonites, much more would He have spared them if they had honestly cast themselves on His mercy. Yea, He spared them because they came; He reproved them because they came thus. In this manner God separated the precious from the vile; He commended their faith in coming, and condemned their mode of approach. Accordingly, while it was well for them that they came at all, nothing was gained, but much was lost, by their crooked policy. Thus is it always, and therefore what encouragement is there here to the open and ingenuous. IV. THE RESULT OF THIS STRATAGEM. They received a place in Israel. This was no small matter; far more than they had expected. This was no small favour where all would have perished. This place in Israel was obtained with difficulty. When it was discovered who these strangers were, the people were roused against the princes who had conducted the treaty with them, and murmured loudly at the result. How true to human nature is this murmuring. It is always easy to criticise those who are in authority, and find fault with the conclusions to which they come. Every toper in a village inn, were you to credit him, could conduct the affairs of the British Empire with greater success than the wisest prime minister that ever lived. The most ignorant and irresponsible individual in a congregation is confident he would never have fallen into the mistakes of his betters. These Israelites perhaps thought that they were very zealous for God in thus murmuring, but I am afraid that self-interest had a little to do with it. Was it not somewhat of a disappointment that they would not be able to finger the spoil of these Gibeonitish cities? How often does selfishness sharpen zeal! The proper time for murmuring or objecting would have been when the treaty was so hastily concluded. But these critics forgot that then also their heads were turned, and that in all likelihood they would have murmured if the princes had proposed any other course than the one they are now condemning. But though equally deceived with their leaders, they were not like them bound by a solemn oath, and therefore they felt free to murmur. Yet it was a good sign that they went no further. Though they grumbled they submitted, and the Gibeonites were allowed to live. They owed their safety to the ability of Joshua and the princes of Israel. In this emergency the leaders displayed great firmness. They felt that it would be better far to fulfil their agreement at any cost rather than by any shift or quibble to retire from it. Surely in this steadfast adherence of Joshua to this covenant the seeker may find great encouragement. There have been murmurers in the house of God who have called in question the grace of that Saviour who forgives sinners. Remember the taunt of the Pharisees, "This Man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." The race of the self-righteous is not yet extinct; but Jesus is not less firm than Joshua, and justifies the ways of God to men in that glorious constellation of grace which the fifteenth chapter of Luke contains. Again, these Gibeonites received a definite place among the people of God. They became an integral part of the nation, with duties as clearly defined as those of the tribe of Levi. Henceforth they were an essential part of the people; Israel's God was theirs; Israel's friends were their friends, Israel's foes their foes; and they were sharers in all Israel's fortunes. The place which these Gibeonites received in Israel was, however, very humble. The lowest kind of drudgery was expected of them. But if their place and occupation are very lowly, their Master is very high and honourable, and He so arranged that they should not be private slaves, scattered through the nation, but that they should be attached to the tabernacle as servants to the priests and Levites. Now the humblest office under a great and good man may be better than the highest place a mean and bad master could offer. It would be better to black the boots of some men than to roll in the carriage of others. And if the place of these Gibeonites was humble, it was at the same time useful. This would be a great consolation to them, and would reconcile them to their lot. The place of these Gibeonites was also a hallowed one; their service was sacred. God brought them near Himself, attached them to His tabernacle, sheltered them under His wing. The altar of Jehovah was the centre of their service. They were nearer God than many in Israel. To be near God is the highest privilege and the chief joy of the renewed heart. And we come near to God just as we make the Cross of Christ the centre of all our service. The doorstep of God's house is a happier resting-place than the downy couch in the gilded pavilion of royal sinners. Still further, these

Gibeonites had a hopeful place in Israel, and that was a great advantage. In the service of such a Master they might well expect to rise, and they did. Ismaiah, one of David's mighty men, was a Gibeonite. Melatiah, a builder of the wall of Jerusalem under Nehemiah, was another. These are instances recorded to show how they prospered and rose in Jehovah's service. In England it is thought a great matter to be recognised in any way as connected with the royal house. The official appointment to such a position may frequently be seen framed and glazed and placed conspicuously in the window. The fact is noted in the gold letters on the sign, on every bill, and notice, and advertisement that is sent from the establishment. They strive to let no one forget or be oblivious of the fact. They find that it is profitable to do so. Much more laboriously should we in all things make it plain whose we are and whom we serve. (*Ibid.*) *League made with the Gibeonites:*—The customs and manners of modern times, in which is less of simplicity and more of parade, and when facilities for intercourse with far distant dwellers would render such a deception quite impossible, cannot be a criterion by which to judge of the policy of this expedient. Strange as it would be viewed by us, neither their appearance nor speech excited suspicion. Their falsehood stands no example for Christians, yet no one but must admire their ingenuity. Necessity is the mother of invention. The resources which have opened in invention have been such as were never thought of in ease and safety. They believed the report, and, being sore afraid, had no expectation of life but from alliance with the Lord's people; therefore were saved in yielding, when others were destroyed in resisting. There is no hope for any but those who, in faith and love, are in league with the true Israel of God—those who seek by prayer, and obtain through grace, a share in their spiritual and eternal interests. And oh! when those tremendous evils which, in the Divine threatenings, impend over the guilty, are so apprehended as to fill transgressors with fears of dying, when the great concerns of another world lie in their full weight on the heart, and they see that all to be hoped for in the best state of future being is endangered and lies at awful stake, what expedients are ready to be adopted! though none ever succeed but the one which the gospel points out as the never-failing provision of mercy. No decree is gone forth against such as cease hostilities, and who voluntarily yield themselves up to the reign of grace, but against those only who persist till they perish in their rebellion. The more determined and inveterate any have been in their opposition to the kingdom of God, the more heartily welcome they become when, in the fervent entreaties of deep-felt need, they apply for life and pardon through the merit of Christ. No sight on earth more interesting than to witness a spiritual subjection to our Divine and glorious Redeemer; to see a forsaking of the world for the Church, and, instead of fighting against God to destruction, sinners obtaining the assurance of life and pardon through faith. These suppliant strangers, with worn-out apparel and musty provision, and bearing every mark of having come a long journey, remind one of the true condition of those who apply to Christ, and who desire to obtain a portion in the inheritance of His people. They are really what these only feigned to be; and should they appear in the best robes of nature, whatever their own opinion, they would be esteemed but as filthy rags by the infinitely holy God, which, in self-loathing, must be thrown aside for change of raiment, for garments of salvation and robes of righteousness. Their address is not less striking than their appearance, and may remind us of a suppliant for mercy, "We are thy servants: make ye a league with us." The security of life they were willing should be held upon servitude of life. What is so dear as life? As Satan said of Job, "Skin for skin; yea, all that a man hath, will he give for his life." And nothing is so much the concern of an awakened mind, as to live in a state of favour with God, and union with His people. It is accounted no slavery, but perfect freedom, as well as secure protection, and to be desired beyond all earthly advantages, to retain life in the service of God. The expedient adopted in their necessity availed. It was a precipitate act, and though highly reprehensible, in not asking counsel of the Lord, to whom all the affairs of His Church and people should be referred in humble and obedient faith, yet it was not to be rescinded. In the all-wise dominion of God it was overruled for mercy to many. Though the command was peremptory, and so utterly to destroy the inhabitants of the land as "to make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them," yet the 20th chapter of Deuteronomy, v. 10 and 11, would induce a hope that they who, whether near or afar off, yielded to the triumphant Church and renounced idolatry would have obtained mercy and been incorporated with the Lord's people. Is not this the very constitution and proce-

dure of the gospel, a most affecting and honourable covenant of peace, requiring only to be closed with and signed by the sinner in submission and faith? As the men of Gibeon came to Israel, have you applied to Jesus for peace? If so, the testimony of conscience will accord with the witness of the Spirit, in that happy hope and assurance which will attend the sealing of the covenant on the heart. Unspeakably blessed their state with whom the promise of life is confirmed: they cannot perish, neither shall any pluck them out of the hands of their covenant God. The sword that spares in mercy will protect in justice. Not long before discovery was made of their artifice. The surprise which this excited was not little, nor the apprehension of consequences to be feared from the precipitate and incautious engagements entered into; for the people all murmured against the princes. But the providence of God was in it, and His honour so involved in His people's regard to their oath that the treaty made could not be broken. If in a case of fraud, and in a certain view the stealing of His mercy, God will not suffer an impeachment of His character by a forfeiture of truth in His people, what shall be said of the inviolability of those engagements of His love for the accomplishment of which He has voluntarily, in the view of all our unworthiness, pledged in solemn oath and promise His own infinite perfections? One cannot but conceive it designed to present us with an idea of the conversion of enemies to God, and afford a prelude of the accession of Gentiles to His Church. Such as God designs to save He inclines to sue for mercy. Servitude became their condition whose lives mercy spared; but that was honourable, as it was holy, and to be preferred to all the degrading liberties and superstitions of idolatry. Life was the constant reward of their service, and in many instances, it may be hoped, grace was connected with their labour. By spiritual instructions imparted in that temple where they served, though in the meanest office, the gracious among them would become sharers in more valuable blessings than any that could be connected with the highest earthly honours. None can be truly in the service of God but they will find better pay and purer satisfaction than any who are serving themselves or the world. (*W. Seaton.*) *Pious frauds*:—In the Gibeonites there was faith—a belief that Israel was under the protection of a remarkable Divine power, under a Divine promise the truth of which even Balaam had very recently acknowledged—"I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee." Undoubtedly a religious feeling lay at the bottom of the proceeding. A great Divine Being was seen to be involved, who was on Israel's side and against his enemies, and it would not do to trifle with Him. But in their way of securing exemption from the effects of His displeasure the grossest superstition appeared. They were to gain their object by deceit. What a strange conception of God! What blindness to His highest attributes, His holiness and His truth! What a miserable God men fashion to themselves when they simply invest Him with almighty power, or perhaps suppose Him to be moved by whims and prejudices and favouritisms like frail man, but omit to clothe Him with His highest glory—forget that "justice and judgment are the habitation of His throne, mercy and truth go before His face." The conduct of the men was the more strange that it was impossible that they should not be speedily found out. And it was quite possible that, when found out, they would be dealt with more severely than ever. True, indeed, Joshua, when he did detect their plot, did not so act; he acted on a high, perhaps a mistaken, sense of honour; but they had no right to count on that. We cannot but respect the way in which Joshua and the princes acted when they discovered the fraud. It might have been competent to repudiate the league on the ground that it was agreed to by them under false pretences. It was made on the representation that the Gibeonites had come from a far country, and when that was seen to be utterly untrue there would have been an honourable ground for repudiating the transaction. But Joshua and the princes did not avail themselves of this loophole. The fact that the name of the Lord God of Israel had been invoked in the oath sworn to the Gibeonites constrained them to abide by the transaction. They carried out that great canon of true religion—first and foremost giving "glory to God in the highest." But though the lives of the Gibeonites were spared, that was all. They were to be reduced to a kind of slavery—to be "hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation and the altar of God." Does anything resembling this fraud of the Gibeonites ever take place among ourselves? In answer, let us ask first of all what is the meaning of pious frauds? Are they not transactions where fraud is resorted to in order to accomplish what are supposed to be religious ends? How can anything be a real religious gain to a man, how can it be otherwise than disastrous in the last degree, if it develops a fraudulent spirit,

if it perverts his moral nature, if it deepens and intensifies the moral disorder of his heart? If men saw "the beauty of holiness," "the beauty of the Lord," they could never bring their minds to such miserable distortions. It is pure blasphemy to suppose that God could thus demean Himself. It is self-degradation to imagine that anything that can be gained by oneself through such means could make up for what is lost or for the guilt incurred by such wickedness. And this suggests a wider thought—the fearful miscalculation men make whensoever they resort to fraud in the hope of reaping benefit by means of it. Yet what practice is more common? The question is, Does it really pay? Does it pay, for instance, to cheat at cards? Does it pay the merchant to cheat as to the quality of his goods? Does it not leak out that he is not to be trusted, and does not that suspicion lose more to him in the long run than it gains? Or, to vary the illustration. When one has entrapped a maiden under false promises, and then forsakes her; or when he conceals the fact that he is already married to another; or when he controls himself for a time, to conceal from her his ill-temper, or his profligate habits, or his thirst for strong drink, does it pay in the end? The question is not, Does he succeed in his immediate object? but, How does the matter end? Is it a comfortable thought to any man that he has broken a trustful heart, that he has brought misery to a happy home, that he has filled some one's life with lamentation and mourning and woe? We are not thinking only of the future life, when so many wrongs will be brought to light, and so many men and women will have to curse the infatuation that made fraud their friend and evil their good. We think of the present happiness of those who live in an atmosphere of fraud, and worship daily at its shrine. Can such disordered souls know ought of real peace and solid joy? All Eastern nations get the character of being deceitful; but indeed the weed may be said to flourish in every soil where it has not been rooted out by living Christianity. But if it be peculiarly characteristic of Eastern nations, is it not remarkable how constantly it is rebuked in the Bible, even though that book sprang from an Eastern soil? No doubt the record of the Bible abounds with instances of deceit, but its voice is always against them. And its instances are always instructive. Satan gained nothing by deceiving our first parents. Jacob was well punished for deceiving Isaac. David's misleading of the high priest when he fled from Saul involved ultimately the slaughter of the whole priestly household. Ananias and Sapphira had an awful experience when they lied unto the Holy Ghost. All through the Bible it is seen that lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but they that deal truly are His delight. And when our blessed Lord comes to show us the perfect life, how free He is from the slightest taint or vestige of deceit! Is it possible for us ever to be worthy of such a Lord? First, surely, we must go to His Cross, and, bewailing all our unworthiness, seek acceptance through His finished work. And then draw from His fulness, even grace for grace; obtain through the indwelling of His Spirit that elixir of life which will send a purer life-blood through our souls, and assimilate us to Him of whom His faithful apostle wrote: "He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth." (*W. G. Blaikie, DD.*)

The Gibeonites:—Do we not see here, first and foremost, the pitiable shifts to which all spiritual fear is driven? The fear of Israel came upon the Gibeonites, and the result was an invention, a false arrangement, an attempt to escape the inevitable. This is the story of to-day. Volumes might be written upon this one thought, namely, that spiritual fear is always and of necessity driven to the most pitiable shifts. Spiritual fear says, "What can I do? I will undertake long pilgrimages; I will discharge severe and exhausting penances; I will build churches, and seem to worship; I will commingle with the people of God as if I were one of them when my heart is a thousand leagues away from the very poorest soul in all the sacred number." The trick of the Gibeonites is the game of to-day. Spiritual fear knows not the spirit of truth, and cannot, of course, know the spirit of joy. Are we not always cursed by this spirit of fear? It leads us to misconstructions of God. He ceases to be God when He is looked at through the medium and under the base inspiration of servile fear. The man in whom the spirit of fear is cannot read the Bible. It is a mere idol to him. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Saints may be outwitted by the world:—Saints are outwitted by the world in the things of the world, and no marvel; neither does it impeach their wisdom, any more than it does a scholar's to be excelled by a cobbler in his mean trade. Nature, where it intends higher excellencies, is more careless in those things which are inferior; as we see in man, who, being made to excel the beasts in a rational soul, is himself excelled by some beast or other in all his senses. Thus the Christian may well be surpassed in

matters of worldly commerce, because he has a nobler object in his eye that makes him converse with the things of the world in a kind of non-attendance; he is not much careful in these matters; if he can die well at last, and be justified for a wise man at the day of resurrection, all is well. (*H. G. Salter.*) *Reprehensible self-distortion*:—Self-abasement is proper; but self-distortion is wrong, false, wicked, hateful to Omniscience. It is the voice of Jacob, though the hands be the hands of Esau: the Pharisee in another face. Was the artifice any the less real on the part of Jeroboam's wife when she appeared in the presence of Ahijah the prophet, though a queen in disguise? Was not the conduct of the Gibeonites crafty and reprehensible? The attempt to make ourselves worse is as bad as trying to make ourselves better. It is hypocrisy either way, and God hates it in every form, in every disguise, for every purpose. Do no violence to self-hood. Be natural, simple, straightforward. Go to the Father in penitence and trustfulness, and then may you say, "For the Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed." (*Thomas Parsons.*) *Beguiled by the crafty enemy*:—How often is the believer who, with Joshua, would have withstood some fierce assault, because driven by it to dependence upon the almighty arm, the all-sufficient grace, of his Divine Captain and Defender, with Joshua beguiled by the tempter's wiles and "the deceitfulness of sin"! The Gibeonites presented themselves to Joshua and to Israel as not falling within the number of those nations whom they had been enjoined to destroy utterly, with whom they must make no truce nor covenant, whom their eyes must not pity nor spare. Does your experience prove that sin is always presented to you as sin—in its native hideousness, its essential heinousness, its inseparable danger? Does the tempter always show the hook with the bait? Are you never tempted to make a league with—to tolerate—to conform to—that which ought to be proscribed and opposed without reserve? Never in danger of calling evil good and good evil; of putting darkness for light and light for darkness; of putting bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter? In a word, are there no Gibeonites among your soul's enemies? (*J. C. Miller, D.D.*) **Old shoes and clouted upon their feet.**—"*Old shoes and clouted*," *patched clothing*:—There are two sorts of hypocrites—those who profess to be better than they are: they form a large class; and those who profess to be worse than they are. There is great scope for hypocrisy even in wearing clothes. There are a great many people who wear very expensive garments at the cost of other people; because they have never paid for them, and never hope to do so. They represent one class of hypocrites. But occasionally you meet with a man who looks dreadfully shabby. His coat has a goodly number of patches, and every garment he wears gives proof of having been well worn. He dies, and leaves many thousands of pounds, sewn in some bag or other, and concealed in the chimney or under the mattress. Now, he is a hypocrite of the other type; he professes to be much poorer than he is. The Gibeonites were hypocrites of this order on this occasion. They acted as they did of a set purpose, not in order to show that they were poor, and thus to gain sympathy, but for quite another purpose. They sought to impress upon Joshua that they had come from a far country: that they had walked a weary journey, and that they had worn out their sandals, their clothes, and wine bags on the journey. They sought to make Joshua believe that they were led to him by kind, unselfish motives: that they had been prompted by such high regard for Joshua and the people whom he led as to earnestly wish to be on good terms with them. One cannot help trying to picture to one's self what happened at Gibeon just before they started. A goodly company of men went forth as ambassadors, and all wanted the oldest clothes they could get. I wonder whether there were second-hand dealers at Gibeon? The articles must have gone up suddenly in price if there were; and what an opportunity for clearing old and bad stock out—all the old sandals, and the old clothes! However that may have been, they got what they required, and at length appeared before Joshua, and represented to him that they had come a long journey, during which they had worn out their clothes, and that they had not had the opportunity of reclothing themselves; but that meanwhile they had been very careful of their garments in patching them diligently and well. It would not have done for them to have come in rags, and therefore they were careful to show to Joshua that, worn out as their garments were, yet they had made the best use of them, and had in each case put in a stitch in time to save nine. I wish that, while abstaining from all the deceit of these men, we could learn one lesson from them. Would that poor people always acted as economically as these people pretended to have acted on this occasion. If there are any of you who are

placed in circumstances where it is necessary to have many patches on your garments, and other boys who are placed in better circumstances than you feel inclined to laugh and sneer at you, never be ashamed of your patches; always consider that every patch on your coat tells everybody what an industrious mother you have at home. On the other hand, a hole that is allowed to remain long and to expand day by day is a reflection on all concerned. Now look at this from another standpoint. You see these people wanted to impress Joshua with the fact that on this one journey they had worn out all the clothing they had provided for themselves. Have you ever thought what a great deal we all wear out in life? Have you ever thought how many garments, how many shoes, and how many hats every boy of twelve has worn out since the day he was born? I suppose the oldest man here would stand perfectly aghast if all the garments he had worn and cast aside were only made to pass before him. Now that is something worth our consideration. It at least teaches us this—that there must be a marvellous Providence which takes care of us in a very extraordinary way. Then, think again of the food consumed. If we only thought of this we should begin to ask, "Where have all these garments come from? and how has all this food been provided? Thus, we should thank God more for His providence, and be less ready to cast away garments when they were half worn, and to think ourselves too good to wear a garment that is comparatively threadbare, though we may be too poor to buy a new one. Now just one word more—it is this. We not only wear out clothes and consume food, but also these bodies of ours, on the journey of life. We have only one body for the journey of life: in other words, we have only one suit for the soul. It is a marvellous suit, it expands as the soul expands. But it is not like the spirit itself; it is not immortal: it is subject to a great deal of wear and tear. Now God mends this for us day by day. But by and by, even with all His care, it begins to wear out. There are some here who are getting on in life. Their soul's garment is not what it was. They cannot run as fast as they could when they were boys: they cannot do as much work as they did when they were young men in the prime of life. What is the matter? Oh, the old garment is beginning to wear, and the good God has to patch it up a little. The doctor says sometimes, "Well, I can patch him up a little bit." But what a grand thing it will be when we shall never wear out! When this garment is put aside, God will provide for us another that will never grow old, and we shall engage in a service of which we shall never tire. (*D. Davies.*) *Causes of raggedness*:—Many a clouted shoe, many a ragged garment has been paraded before the eyes of men during the three thousand years that have passed since the jaded asses of Gibeon entered the camp at Gilgal. Let me name some shams to be avoided. 1. Beware first of the shams of social life. Let us rather put up with the blame of being blunt and uncivil than feel that we are constantly begirt and bedizened with shams as deceitful as were the clouted shoes and the ragged raiment of these men of Gibeon. 2. Let me urge you also to beware of the shams of trade and commerce. And I do not limit these to what may be found in the shop and the market-place. I extend the warning to every professional pursuit. There are shams in them all. It has grown into a proverb, that "there are tricks in all trades"; and the proverb is more pointed because it is so true. Be poor men all your lives rather than richer ones, if riches can only be won by practices as disreputable as were the clouted shoes and the ragged raiment of the deputies of Gibeon. 3. And let us beware, above all, of the shams of religion. The most loathsome of all hypocrisy is that which assumes the garb of religion. The man who dares to assume this that he may further his own selfish ends joins himself to Ananias and Sapphira, and is not afraid to sin against the Holy Ghost. Oh! in whatever else we are hypocrites, let it not be in assuming the language and demeanour of followers of Christ while our hearts are far from Him and rebelling against Him! for this is worse an hundredfold than the clouted shoes and the ragged raiment of the Gibeonites. And of these representative shams that I have named, and of all others, it is to be remembered that one day will declare them. But though I have drawn these lessons from the words of the text, as spoken of those who wore the clouted shoes and the ragged raiment, to effect a dishonest treaty, and to give colour to a lying tale, yet the words occurred to my mind as descriptive of those by whom the clouted shoes and ragged raiment are not assumed from choice, but worn from the grim necessity that they have no other. And it is concerning this class of our communities, and our duty towards them, that I wish now to speak. It is a humbling fact that amid the civilisation and wealth of our land, of which we are so proud, there are hundreds and thousands of poor, neglected waifs—men,

women, and children—who are homeless and unsheltered. Of the children, at any rate, we must say that by some cruel misfortune they are degraded to a sphere immeasurably below their birthright as children of immortality. They are more sinned against than sinning. If they are called by the opprobrious name of "human vermin," whose fault is it that they are such? If they have been declared to be "attired in the unalterable livery of scoundreldom," whose fault is it that this new and terrible representative class has been suffered to grow up in our midst in monster proportions? If they have been called by a more truthful title, the "Arabs of the streets," "their hand against every man," must it not be confessed that it is because every man's hand has so long been against them? It is our bounden duty to inquire something into the producing causes of this great mass of human sorrow, and misery, and want, and sin; let us try to do so. Of course there is a certain amount of this utter poverty for which the idleness and laziness of the people themselves must be blamed. It is true now as when Solomon said it, that "drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags." But what can we say for those homeless children who are striving to earn an honest penny by gathering holly, by holding horses, and so on? Their homelessness and raggedness has come down to them; they are born with it; their only heritage one of woe! I trace it to two causes: first, improvidence; and second, extravagance, especially in the two articles of dress and drink. But since rags and tatters are already the heritage of many thousands of children, from the improvidence and drunkenness of their parents, we must do something more than aim at removing the producing causes; we must help those hapless ones who are already in rags. I know that we shrink from doing so. This is one of the penalties of abject misery. But this feeling of aversion, though common, is unchristian! Our Lord never shrank from contact with the poorest, and filthiest, and most ragged and loathsome leper. And so it becomes us, who profess to follow in His steps, to seek to gather in even the most ragged outcast on our streets and lanes. (*J. E. Clarke, M.A.*) **The men . . . asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord.** —*Seek direction from God:*—Let the fault and neglect of the leaders of Israel instruct you. They were deceived because they asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord. The Urim and Thummim and the High Priest were in the camp, and from them an infallible answer might have been obtained. Go ye then, in the hour of temptation, to God by prayer. Implore His counsel and direction; and the Holy Spirit, in answer to your fervent petition, shall give you a right judgment in all things. Cry each of you to God, "What I know not, that teach Thou me." "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart," &c. Study the Bible; be instant in prayer: so shall the eyes of your understanding be opened to discern the causes of danger; and so shall you be enabled to live with that holy caution which, through Divine grace, will make a way for you to escape. "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." (*R. P. Buddicom, M.A.*) *Going astray:*—There is an old but wholesome proverb which speaks of "making more haste than good speed." We find the same truth, otherwise expressed, in Scripture; expressed as a part of the will of God, from whose right of control over man flow all those duties of caution, deliberation, and foresight which are inculcated nowhere so forcibly as in the Bible. We have in this passage a very remarkable illustration of our homely English proverb; and at the same time a very remarkable illustration of forgetfulness of the Divine saying, "Acknowledge God in all thy ways, and He shall direct thy paths." "The men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel of the Lord." I. THIS WAS UNJUSTIFIABLE. 1. They had the teaching of direct precepts that forbid it. They were told that the land which was given them to possess was filled with a wicked people, whose cup was full, and that their "strange work" was their extermination. Thus instructed, they were to make no covenant with any of the inhabitants of the land, but to smite "utterly both man and beast." This precept, or rather reiterated command, they forgot; acting under impulse they forgot what was written, and governed by feeling they overlooked the law. 2. They had the teachings of their own experience that should have suggested caution. Let us not so conduct ourselves: let us remember the past only to be wiser for the future; let obedience to law be the rule of our life, lest some stern and inexorable calamity should come and crush us into inevitable submission. 3. All this was perfectly unjustifiable. Whatever consequences might have resulted, they could only blame themselves. Precept and precedent were against them, yet blindly and wilfully they defied both. II. THE RESULTS OF THIS FORGETFULNESS. 1. To the Israelites. The moment the mistake was found out the multitude, who had said nothing before, began of course to murmur. So frequently, when men connive at each other's iniquities and mistakes,

as soon as one of their number is reduced to trouble his partners in folly will be the first to upbraid him. God may forgive us our sins and our follies; but He will not by miracle interpose to save us from the natural consequences of our violation of the laws by which He manifests the everlasting unchangeableness of His moral government. 2. To the Gibeonites. Lying and cheating always defeat themselves in the long run. (*W. G. Barrett.*) *Hasty judgments:*—The children of Israel made two mistakes here. I. They received these men by reason of their victuals. THEY JUDGED IN A HASTY AND SUPERFICIAL WAY. By hasty judgments we are led into wrong in several directions. 1. Hasty judgments lead us to wrong others. 2. Hasty judgments lead us to wrong God. You take a superficial view of your troubles, and you think God is a tyrant and is cruel. 3. How many reject the truth by such hasty judgment. Some trifle suffices—a silly criticism they heard years ago—to lead them to give up Christianity and lose their souls. This, then, is the first lesson of the text: To form no judgment concerning any man or any thing on insufficient or defective data. II. They "asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord." THEY ACTED UPON THEIR OWN WIT AND DISCERNMENT. If you have any wit, you are to use it. You may think you know all about the harbour of success, every shallow, every sunken rock, yet it would be better to take a pilot on board. I prefer to employ a praying doctor, a praying lawyer. (*H. M. Scudder, D.D.*) *A judgment over self-reliance:*—What an ominous sound there is in those words! They portend disaster, and it befell. Up to this moment the initiative had always been taken by the Lord. Now for the first time it is taken by Joshua and the people. In all the previous chapters the words run thus: "And the Lord said unto Joshua"; but there is no such phrase in this. Israel through her chosen leaders acted for herself, and easily fell into the trap. If only they had inquired of the Lord the dimming light in the sacred stone would have betrayed the fatal secret and arrested the formation of the league. Let us lay the moral to our heart. Earth's sombre tints and cross-lights are very perplexing; and it is often extremely hard to detect the truth. The foolish virgins are so much like the wise; the tares so resemble the wheat; the hireling imitates so precisely the Shepherd's voice; the devil's mimicry of an angel of light is so exact; bye-path meadow is parted from the King's highway by so narrow a boundary. We urgently need, as the apostle prayed for his Philippian converts, that we may have, not only all knowledge, but all discernment, so that we may prove the things that differ (Phil. i. 10, R.V. margin). In one place this power to discriminate is said to result from use (Heb. v. 14); whilst in the passage already quoted it is attributed to an abounding love. But following the suggestion of the narrative before us, we may say that it will follow naturally on the careful cultivation of the blessed habit of asking counsel at the mouth of the Lord. Never trust your own judgment. When voices within or without would hasten you to decide on the strength of your own conclusions, then be careful to refer the whole matter from the lower court of your own judgment to the supreme tribunal of God's. If there is any doubt or hesitation left after such reference, be sure that as yet the time has not come for you to understand all God's will. Under such circumstances wait. Throw the responsibility of the pause and all it may involve on God, and dare still to wait. As a traveller over the hills, when the mist has come down, elects to stand or lie where it overtakes him, rather than wander on, perhaps to the brink of a precipice, so wait. If you trust God absolutely it is for Him to give you clear directions as to what you should do. And when the time for action arrives He will have given you such unmistakable indications of His will that, though a fool, you will not be able to mistake them or err therein. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) **Joshua made peace with them.**—The grand inquiry here is whether this league was lawful or not? Answer the first: Some have these sentiments, that it was unlawful upon those grounds, because (1) God forbade Israel to make any league with the Canaanites, and bade to destroy them all (Exod. xxiii. 32, xxxiv. 15; Deut. vii. 2) without making any exceptions, &c. (2) Secondly, the people murmured at this league (ver. 18), which they ought not to have done, had it been lawful. (3) Joshua denounces those Gibeonites accursed for deceiving him (ver. 23), which he would not have done had nothing been done but what was just and equal. (4) He charged them with circumventing him by dissimulation (ver. 21). Answer the second: but others affirm it was a lawful league, as Augustine and all the rabbis, &c., upon those grounds. First, it was lawful for Israel to offer peace to other nations before they besieged any of their cities (Deut. xx. 10), which shows this league was lawful as to the substantial part of it. Secondly, this sanguinary law of killing all the Canaanites was not absolute and universal, but admitted of an exception of penitents and true converts, as

appeareth from Jer. xviii. 7, 8, and John iii. 4. Thirdly, that this law was thus limited (being only a positive law, and so might be qualified with a natural and moral equity) appears in Israel's sparing Rahab and her relations. Fourthly, the reason of that sanguinary law was lest those Canaanites that were not killed might entice the Israelites to their idolatry. Now that reason ceased at their turning from idolatry and becoming proselytes to Israel, &c. Fifthly, that the Gibeonites were converts appears, for their hearts were not hardened as the other Canaanites were (chap. xi. 19, 20). They came to Joshua here in the name of the Lord (ver. 9), and they had this blessing, to have a near approach unto God in their service of the sanctuary (ver. 27), where David could have been content to be a poor door-keeper (Psa. lxxxiv. 10). Sixthly, Had this league been unlawful it had been better broken than kept; if it had been a sin to make it, the sin would have been double to keep it; but Joshua and all the princes upon the review of it did conscientiously keep it (vers. 19, 20, 22, 23). Seventhly, God severely punished the violaters of this league, long, even 400 years, after, as 2 Sam. xxi. 3. Saul's rash zeal cost the seven of his sons' lives, and so almost rooted out his whole posterity. Eighthly, The utter destruction of all the other cursed Canaanites came not so much or so necessarily upon them by virtue of any absolute or peremptory precept for destroying them as it did from their own obstinacy and obduration of their hearts, whereby they did not only neglect but also scorned to make peace (chap. xi. 19, 20). (*C. Ness.*) **Hewers of wood and drawers of water.**—*Mistakes divinely overruled:*—This is a beautiful and comforting example of the way in which God overrules our mistakes, and brings blessing out of our sins, as the chemist obtains his loveliest dyes from the refuse of gas retorts. Inadvertently, and without due consideration, some of my readers may have entered into alliance with a Gibeonite, whether in marriage, in business, or in some other sphere. Are they therefore to abandon their high privilege, and forsake their lofty ministry to the world? Must they cease to be God's portion, and the priests of men? Not necessarily. Let them turn to God in repentance and confession, and He will teach them how these very hindrances may become great means of help, so that they shall hew the wood for the burnt-offering, draw the water for the libations, and promote the prosperity and well-being of the soul. Out of the eater shall come forth meat, and out of the strong sweetness. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*)

CHAPTER X.

VERS. 1–5. **Come up unto me, and help me, that we may smite Gibeon: for it hath made peace with Joshua.**—*To arms! To arms!*—The greatest poet of Greece has sung in stately numbers the deeds of heroes whom his race adored. We listen to their counsels, we hear their battle shouts, we see their awful blows. Yet after all this plain, unvarnished tale depicts with more fidelity and power the progress and results of a conflict, the most sublime in its accompaniments that this earth has ever seen. In this chapter we have recorded not only one of Joshua's most brilliant victories, but one of the world's greatest battles: a struggle surpassing in importance and interest Issus or Arbela, Marathon or Cannae, and affecting to an incalculable extent the religious and political, the moral and the material, welfare of mankind. First of all we listen to the summons—"Come up unto me, and help me, that we may smite Gibeon," &c. Notice from whom the summons comes. From Adoni-zedek, king of Jerusalem. This is a strange thing. From this man's name, Lord of Righteousness, and from his heritage, Jerusalem, we would have expected something very different. He is certainly the successor, probably the descendant, of Melchizedek. Here is a man who bears the best of titles, but is, alas! unworthy of it. Nothing could be better than his name; few things are worse than his fame. Learn from this sad lesson that piety is not hereditary. The descendants of the righteous may be a wicked seed. This is a sad thing. A noble ancestry is not a thing to be despised. It is unwise and ungrateful to ignore the records and the glories of the past. This is also a dangerous thing. The opposition of those who have thus fallen is always most dangerous. None are so bitter and remorseless, so vehement and virulent, so venomous and subtle, as renegades. Notice to whom Adoni-zedek's message was sent. It was not sent to all the members

of the great national league. That was impossible, because the submission of the Gibeonites had split the confederacy into two unequal parts. Instead of one vast army marching to crush the invader there must now be two: one in the south, the other in the north. That of the south is smaller, therefore more easily set in motion; and it is also placed nearer the centre of attack. Thus we see how God has restrained the wrath of the enemy and deprived him of half his might. Even so all coalition against Him must fall to pieces. Transgressors are always lacking in cohesion. It was to Gibeon that Adoni-zedek summoned his confederates. Thus his enmity was manifested against their defection. Still this summons of Adoni-zedek betokens fear. It is to some extent the blustering of a bully who is at heart a craven. We know this, for we are told that "When Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem had heard how Joshua had taken Ai, and had utterly destroyed it . . . that they feared greatly." Therefore because they fear they do not come alone. They keep their courage up by company. How many are like them. They do fear when spiritual truths are brought before them, when God's judgment stares them in the face; yet they try to find comfort in the thought, "Well, if I am lost a great many will be badly off." Nay! nay! It is a vain thing to banish fear by such thoughts. Such a fear as that works destruction; because being accompanied by a rebellious heart and a darkened mind it led to union against God. Hatred against the Gibeonites is a very distinct characteristic of Adoni-zedek's message. Yet, after all, what right had they to be thus angry with their old friends? Had not the Gibeonites a right to have a mind of their own, especially in a matter that concerned their very existence? But the human heart remains the same. When the sinner turns from his rebellion and humbles himself before God, then is the time for the wrath of man to be revealed. This hatred is most unreasonable, for, like these Gibeonites, the penitents in throwing down the weapons of their rebellion set an example which it is the highest wisdom to follow. The cunning and the impiety of these Canaanites are also revealed by this confederation. They will prevent further defection; they will gain one of the most important strongholds in the land; they will make the old league possible. Thus they displayed their craft. And in doing so they proved their impiety. (*A. B. Mackay.*) *Rage of the world against deserters from its ranks:*—It is thus in the spiritual life. Upon no outer enemy does the world turn with such rage and resentment as upon those who desert their ranks to join the Lord's host. All the legions of hell are marshalled forth against the young believer who has newly signed the terms of treaty with the Joshua of the better covenant. As Bishop Hall says, "If a convert come home, the angels welcome him with song, the devils follow him with uproar and fury, his old partners with scorn and obloquy." In spite of all this, let not those who have become allied to the Israel of God quail; but let the sequel here before us reassure them. (*G. W. Butler, M.A.*) *Combinations against the Church:*—What combinations have been formed, what artifices practised against the Church!—one wile to allure, another to frighten, and sometimes to destroy. As against the Lord Himself, so against His people, the great and the mighty of the earth have consulted their ruin, and for a season availed to harass and distress the saints; nor can this be matter of surprise to those who know their own character, and remember what themselves were till converted by the grace of God. The Church's gain is the world's grief, as it is the world's loss. Oh, what oppositions in families, what combinations out of old connections and associates, have been raised against those who, no longer of the world, have been chosen out of it, and through grace enabled to turn their backs upon its vanities and pursuits! No sooner is it known that any have made peace with our spiritual Joshua than the world is up in arms, and war declared, lasting as the irreconcilable enmity of fallen nature. Not one who openly declares himself on the Lord's side, and is inwardly devoted to His glory, but, according to the station he occupies, and the influence of those around him, will experience a full measure. (*W. Seaton.*)

Vers. 6–11. **Come up . . . quickly, and save us, and help us.**—*Help! help!*—The chapter opens with a cry from Jerusalem, the summons of Adoni-zedek—"To arms! To arms!" Here we have another and a very different cry, a cry from Gibeon; a cry to Joshua for help. I. THE TROUBLE OF THE GIBEONITES. They are in sore straits. What a vivid picture of spiritual truth have we here! "He that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey." Do you make your peace with God? that instant, and by that act, you are at war with Satan. No sooner is the treaty of salvation signed than the infernal hosts are rallied. The ink is scarcely dry before he begins

his attack. Old friends become new enemies. A man's foes are often those of his own household. When we come into such trouble let us not think that a strange thing has befallen us. It is the common fate of God's children, from the highest to the meanest, and to the end of time. Though the Captain of salvation is the Prince of Peace, He has come not to send peace on the earth but a sword; and so will it be till every enemy is cast out and all flesh shall own Him Lord. These Gibeonites felt this attack all the more dangerous because it was the onset of men with whom in the past they had been on such intimate terms. All their conditions and resources were as well known to these five kings as to themselves. And the remembrance of these things made this attack all the more formidable. But what was all the knowledge which the five kings had of the Gibeonites compared with the knowledge Satan has of us? Therefore, how terrible must be his attack! If we are not ignorant of his devices, he is not ignorant of our weakness. II. But if this cry suggests the trouble of the Gibeonites, IT ALSO POINTS OUT THEIR RESOURCES. If they are in great trouble they are not without resource, and at once they avail themselves of it. They dwelt in a fortified city, but they did not depend on its walls and bulwarks. They had no confidence in themselves. Their own resources were insufficient. All their confidence was placed in Joshua. Would that we always showed like wisdom! Sin and Satan are more than a match for the strongest saint. As they looked to Joshua, so must we look to Jesus. As they depended on that covenant of peace which had been ratified, so must we. As they dispatched runners post haste to Gilgal, so must we send out swift-footed messengers of prayer. Our very existence as saints depends on their success. III. THE EARNESTNESS OF THE GIBEONITES. How keen and piercing is their cry! How urgent is their request! The message was no doubt short, they did not waste their words; but it was full of earnestness. It was the message of men thoroughly roused and anxious. Though short it was very full. They sought to stir up Joshua's energy. It is as if they said, "We have no hope apart from you. We are all dead men if you fail us. We know you can save us and trust you will." They also manifested faithfulness to Joshua, by the last two words of their message—"Help us." Why were these words added? "Save" is the word of dependence—"Help" suggests the determination to do what they can. It is as if they said, "While we feel that in our own strength we must be worsted, yet we are determined to make a stand against them. On no account will we come to terms. We will never open our gates to the enemy. We will not even hold parley with him. Till you come, and even if you do not come, we will do the best we can." Accordingly this shows that they were faithful to their new leader. Surely their conduct in this emergency may well be imitated. Oh, for like earnestness in crying, "Awake, awake, O arm of the Lord!" How languid are our prayers! How unconscious are we of danger! It is good for God to open our eyes by trouble, if it leads us to cry like these Gibeonites. IV. THE SUCCOUR OF THE GIBEONITES. Help was sure. Joshua would have belied his name, would have been unfaithful to his covenant, would have been untrue to his nature, if he had not hastened to their relief. And help came speedily. Joshua lost not a moment. Help also came in time. Joshua was not too late. The Gibeonites did not become a prey; they had cause to rejoice over a great deliverance. Do we in every extremity cry to God? Help must come. God never said to any, "Seek ye My face," in vain. Jesus, like Joshua, is never too late. If He tarries there is good reason for it. It is always for our good. He may come when Lazarus is laid in the grave, but He never comes too late. He is never too late in history. The world had a long time run its course before He came. Why? Because that time was set. "In the fulness of time God set forth His Son." He has promised to come back again, and depend upon it He will not come back too late. What though 1,800 years have passed away? nothing will divert Him from His purpose; nothing will prevent His appearing. "Amen," therefore we say, "Amen, even so, in Thy good time, for that is quickly, come, Lord Jesus." And notice, in conclusion, that it may be said of these Gibeonites that they were twice saved. First they were saved from the wrath of God; then they were saved from the wrath of their enemies. So we are saved from the wrath of God and from the wrath of Satan. The Gibeonites were saved by faith, for they trusted in Joshua and in the God of Israel. They were saved by works, for they determined to oppose Adoni-zedek or die. They were saved by hope, for they looked to Joshua for succour and were not disappointed. So we are saved by faith when we fall at the feet of Jesus and put our trust in Him. We are saved by works, when in the strength of God we wrestle against principalities and powers and spiritual wickednesses in

high places. We are saved by hope when we look for the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour. The Gibeonites were saved by coming to Joshua in their fear of judgment. They were saved by Joshua coming to them and extricating them out of all their trouble. So we are saved by coming to Jesus. The instant we fall at His feet we receive the salvation of our souls. And we are saved by Jesus coming to us (Heb. ix. 28). (*A. B. Mackay.*) *The newly-converted assailed*:—1. No sooner is the soul brought into the bonds of the covenant with our Joshua or Jesus, but presently the spiritual enemies of the soul muster up all their forces against it, as the five cursed kings did against Gibeon as soon as they had entered into a league with Joshua here (2 Tim. iii. 12; Acts xiv. 22). 2. The soul when thus assaulted must immediately send the messenger of prayer to its Joshua or Jesus. 3. As those new converts the Gibeonites showed their confidence in that God, whose religion they had newly embraced, therefore sent they for Joshua, not at all doubting of salvation by him. So the like confidence should be found in all new converted souls, that their Joshua will relieve them, and turn their spirit of bondage into the spirit of adoption. (*C. Ness.*) *Ready help*:—The help required was great: "Slack not thy hand from thy servants." It is not little the Christian needs. How often, in seeking Divine aid and security, has the believer to say, "Lord, how are they increased that trouble me"! &c. Ready help was intreated. "Come up to us quickly, and save us." It was well they were not what they once represented themselves to be—the inhabitants of a far remote country; for then help had come too late, had it come with bottles rent and bound up, shoes clouted and worn out, garments old and threadbare. Great is the mercy to be near our mercies, that when life, and all that is dear to us, lies at stake, salvation may be found at hand. (*W. Seaton.*) *Value of promptitude in action*:—Let us note not only the nobility of this acknowledgment of the claims of the new allies, but also the promptitude and energy with which their rescue is undertaken. How many good resolves are marred and made of none effect by lack of decision in their execution. We rest in the thought of our noble plans, and meanwhile we hesitate and defer to carry them out in the performance: thus the evils we might have stayed grow beyond control: the opportunity has sped away; the hearts of those who looked for our help are sick with hopes long deferred. Too late! too late! is the disappointed cry with which they greet our tardy steps. (*G. W. Butler, M.A.*) **Fear them not: for I have delivered them into thine hand.**—*Courage!*—On the eve of a great engagement a wise leader often rouses the enthusiasm of his followers by a few well-chosen words. We know how the message of Nelson, before the battle of Trafalgar, stimulated every man in his fleet to do his utmost; and not only so, but it has also come ringing down the years that intervene with telling effect on every noble heart in great emergencies. God deals with His servants after the same fashion; therefore, here, before Joshua passes forth to the rescue of the Gibeonites, he gives them words of cheer. Notice when God gave this encouragement. It was when Joshua had resolved to set out to the help of the Gibeonites. There is no evidence that Joshua asked for or even expected such encouragement. He felt bound to do his duty, to keep faith with the Gibeonites, and while in the act of responding to their cry, this encouragement came. The very fact that this cheering word was unsolicited made it doubly sweet. We may have similar experiences. When we walk in the path of duty we may always reckon on the Divine encouragement. If we go to God's work with good will, however hard it may be, and whoever may oppose, we may always count on the good will and the good word of God, and surely that ought to suffice. How encouraging, how comforting, how strengthening, is the answer of a good conscience towards God! Notice, also, the terms of this encouragement now given. They were very clear. They had no particle of ambiguity. How the healthy soul rejoices in certainty! How freely does God delight to give it! And the fact that the words Joshua now heard were familiar to his ear, phrases repeated again and again, made this assurance doubly sweet. God is dealing with him now as He has graciously done in all the past; and every repetition and new fulfilment of a promise adds to its value. For the old promise has been tried and tested again and again, and proved to be sufficient. It is good when we have such experience as Joshua; when we have not only a true word, but one which in our own experience we have tried and proved to be sufficient for every emergency. Therefore notice next the effect that this encouragement has upon Joshua. It fills him with new energy. The clearest assurance of success does not do away with the use of means, rather is it a sharp spur to make the most of them. Joshua, though thus assured, yea, because thus assured, acts as if everything

depended on his energy and the swiftness and strength of his attack. And so in a very important sense it did. But we may not only trace the effect of this promise in the energy with which it filled Joshua and his soldiers, but also in that marvellous prayer which rose to his lips in the great crisis of the fight that ensued. It is this great promise of God which justifies and explains that great prayer of Joshua. Joshua "spoke to the Lord" on that day, and his words were wonderful. His prayer was very short, but we are startled by its boldness. The prayer was public, therefore Joshua risked all his reputation on its answer. The prayer was humble. He had no desire to parade his power; he had no need to win the allegiance of Israel. His one thought was the perfect fulfilment of that work which by this promise God had said would be accomplished. God had spoken. His power and glory are pledged to the fulfilment of that word. Can He not perform? God gave Joshua a large promise, and Joshua laid before God a large prayer. Thus both God's power and Joshua's faith were magnified and made honourable. In like manner may we make use of all God's promises; and we only prove our unbelief by leaving them a dead letter. Who can over-estimate the value of prayer, who can put a limit to its power? Did we believe in the promises of God as firmly as Joshua, we would be able more closely to imitate his prayers. Men make difficulties here where the simple soul can find none. As a living father can answer the request of his children, so the Lord can hear and answer the prayer of His people. And He answers every prayer addressed to Him; not always in the same way, but always in the best way. Now notice, lastly, the fulfilment of this promise. No doubt the good generalship of Joshua and the valour of his soldiers had much to do with it. They marched with swiftness, they laid on with might and main, they never paused in the pursuit, yet all that they did was obscured by the wonderful interposition of God. Joshua and Israel did what they could, and yet God did all. It is well to remember that nature may become one great arsenal for the defence of those that fear God, for the destruction of all His enemies. It was no superstition, but true godliness, which enabled our forefathers to see the finger of God in those storms which swept the great Armada to its doom. How often does God in His adorable Providence render the very objects in which men trust the means of filling them with shame and confusion of face! How manifestly was God with Israel! How evident is it that "The Lord reigneth!" Israel needed that assurance, and we need it too. Whatever may come to pass from year to year, from century to century, He and He alone is guiding the world and the Church to that goal which He has foreknown and appointed. This is the sheet-anchor of all our hopes for humanity. (*A. B. Mackay.*) **They were more which died with hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword.**—*The Lord's artillery*:—We have seen how Gibeon made peace with Joshua. Adoni-zedec, king of Jerusalem, was exceedingly displeased with the men of Gibeon for making peace with the enemy. 1. The Divine cause has enemies. 2. But the enemies of the Divine cause have both earth and heaven against them—the sword of Israel and the hail of God. The living God has two great forces; if you escape one, you fall under the power of the other. All things fight for God. The hailstones are His friends and allies; the stars in their courses beat and throb according to His purpose and express His intent. The bad cause has no friends; it comes to an ignominious end; it is overwhelmed by hailstones. It is so humbling. The bad cause perishes in contempt. The five kings ran away and hid themselves in a cave, and Joshua said, "Bring them out!" (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 12. The sun stood still, and the moon stayed.—*The battle of Bethhoron*:—In some respects this victory had a special significance. In the first place, it had a most important bearing on the success of the whole enterprise; its suddenness, its completeness, its manifold grandeur being admirably fitted to paralyse the enemy in other parts of the country, and open the whole region to Joshua. By some it has been compared to the battle of Marathon, not only on account of the suddenness with which the decisive blow was struck, but also on account of the importance of the interests involved. It was a battle for freedom, for purity, for true religion, in opposition to tyranny, idolatry, and abominable sensuality; for all that is wholesome in human life, in opposition to all that is corrupt; for all that makes for peaceful progress, in opposition to all that entails degradation and misery. The prospects of the whole world were brighter after that victory of Bethhoron. The relation of heaven to earth was more auspicious, and more full of promise for the days to come. In the next place the tokens of Divine aid were

very impressive. After the experience which Joshua had had of the consequences of failing to ask God for direction when first the Gibeonites came to him, we may be very sure that on the present occasion he would be peculiarly careful to seek Divine counsel. And he was well rewarded. Then as to the miracle of the sun and the moon standing still. It is well known that this was one of the passages brought forward by the Church of Rome to condemn Galileo, when he affirmed that the earth and the moon revolved round the sun, and that it was not the motion of the sun round the earth, but the rotation of the earth on her own axis that produced the change of day and night. No one would dream now of making use of this passage for any such purpose. Whatever theory of inspiration men may hold, it is admitted universally that the inspired writers used the popular language of the day in matters of science, and did not anticipate discoveries which were not made till many centuries later. A far more serious question has been raised as to whether this miracle ever occurred, or could have occurred. To those who believe in the possibility of miracles, it can be no conclusive argument that it could not have occurred without producing injurious consequences the end of which can hardly be conceived. For if the rotation of the earth on its axis was suddenly arrested, all human beings on its surface, and all loose objects whatever must have been flung forward with prodigious violence; just as, on a small scale, on the sudden stoppage of a carriage, we find ourselves thrown forward, the motion of the carriage having been communicated to our bodies. But really this is a paltry objection; for surely the Divine power that can control the rotation of the earth is abundantly able to obviate such effects as these. We can understand the objection that God, having adjusted all the forces of nature, leaves them to operate by themselves in a uniform way without disturbance or interference; but we can hardly comprehend the reasonableness of the position that if it is His pleasure miraculously to modify one arrangement, He is unable to adjust all relative arrangements, and make all conspire harmoniously to the end desired. But was it a miracle? The narrative, as we have it, implies not only that it was, but that there was something in it stupendous and unprecedented. It comes in as a part of that supernatural process in which God has been engaged ever since the deliverance of His people from Egypt, and which was to go on till they should be finally settled in the land. It naturally joins on to the miraculous division of the Jordan, and the miraculous fall of the walls of Jericho. We must remember that the work in which God was now engaged was one of peculiar spiritual importance and significance. He was not merely finding a home for His covenant people; He was making arrangements for advancing the highest interests of humanity; He was guarding against the extinction on earth of the Divine light which alone can guide man in safety through the life that now is, and in preparation for that which is to come. Who will take upon him to say that at an important crisis in the progress of the events which were to prepare the way for this grand consummation, it was not fitting for the Almighty to suspend for a time even the ordinances of heaven, in order that a day's work, carrying such vast consequences, might not be interrupted before its triumphant close? One other notable feature in the transaction of this day was the completeness of the defeat inflicted by Joshua on the enemy. This defeat went on in successive stages from early morning till late at night. First, there was the slaughter in the plain of Gibeon. Then the havoc produced by the hail and by Joshua on the retreating army. Then the destruction caused as Joshua followed the enemy to their cities. And the work of the day was wound up by the execution of the five kings. Moreover, there followed a succession of similar scenes at the taking and sacking of their cities. When we try to realise all this in detail, we are confronted with a terrible scene in blood and death, and possibly we may find ourselves asking, "Was there a particle of humanity in Joshua, that he was capable of such a series of transactions?" But it must be said, and said firmly for Joshua, that there is no evidence of his acting on this or on other such occasions in order to gratify personal feelings; it was not done either to gratify a thirst for blood, or to gratify the pride of a conqueror. Joshua all through gives us the impression of a man carrying out the will of another; inflicting a judicial sentence, and inflicting it thoroughly at the first so that there might be no need for a constant series of petty executions afterwards. This certainly was his aim; but the enemy showed themselves more vital than he had supposed. And when we turn to ourselves and think what we may learn from this transaction, we see a valuable application of his method to the spiritual warfare. God has enemies still, within and without, with whom we are called to contend. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but

against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." When we are fighting with the enemy within our own hearts leniency is our great temptation, but at the same time our greatest snare. What we need here is courage to slay. And in reference to the outside world, want of thoroughness in warfare is still our besetting sin. If only the Church had more faith, and, as the fruit of faith, more courage and more enterprise, what help from heaven might not come to her! True, she would not see the enemy crushed by hailstones, nor the sun standing in Gibeon, nor the moon in the valley of Ajalon; but she would see grander sights; she would see men of spiritual might raised up in her ranks; she would see tides of strong spiritual influence overwhelming her enemies. Jerichos dismantled, Ais captured, and the champions of evil falling like Lucifer from heaven to make way for the King of kings and Lord of lords. Let us go to the Cross of Jesus to revive our faith and recruit our energies. (*W. G. Blaikie, D.D.*) *Fixing of sun and moon in the heavens*:—I. CONSIDER THE ARGUMENTS, USUALLY ADVANCED AGAINST THE POSSIBILITY OF THE SUN AND MOON STANDING STILL IN THE HEAVENS. Not merely is it objected that such an occurrence would be an unwarrantable interference with the laws of nature; but the historian's veracity has also been called in question. It is argued that in recording the circumstance he does not express himself scientifically; but that, on the contrary, he evinces ignorance of the true principles of astronomy: that therefore he should not be regarded as an inspired writer, this circumstance being sufficient in itself to shake credit in his testimony. To this objection we reply—Joshua did not mean to furnish us with a treatise on astronomy. He expressed himself according to the opinion formed on scientific topics during the times in which he lived. Do not we, ourselves, who know that it is the earth which moves, and not the sun, commonly speak of his rising and setting; while perfectly aware that in reality he neither rises nor sets. Certainly the lengthening out of the day (on the occasion of Joshua defeating the five kings) must have been caused by the earth not revolving so rapidly on its axis as it usually does. It is well known that in the equatorial regions the earth moves from west to east at the rate of one thousand miles in the hour; and that the rapidity of motion gradually diminishes as we go from the equator to the poles; so that, at the poles, there is no motion whatever. Supposing that, instead of moving at its usual speed, our earth were to revolve, on its axis, only five hundred miles in the hour: the result would be that the day would be protracted to double the ordinary length, because the apparent passage of the sun first, and of the moon next, over the concave surface would be proportionally retarded. But it is further objected that such an interference with the course of nature would have occasioned irreparable mischief. What! Is anything too hard for God? Cannot He, who called nature into existence, suspend its laws and operations when He pleases? Is any man so well acquainted with the complex machinery of nature as to be prepared to say that the conception and development of animal life are possible things; but that the slackening of the earth's rotary motion is an impossibility? And now, before dismissing this head of our subject, we shall adduce from pagan mythology a proof that the miracle referred to in our text did really occur. The superstitious Greeks, in olden times, worshipped the sun, under the name of Apollo, who (according to them) had a son who was called Phaeton. Apollo was supposed to drive the chariot of the sun daily through the skies. Phaeton requested his father to permit him to drive the chariot for a single day. Apollo granted the request. Phaeton proved an unskilful charioteer, in being unable to curb the horses, which therefore went out of the proper track. Jupiter (whom the ancient pagans regarded as the supreme god) irritated at Phaeton's rashness, and fearing that a conflagration of heaven and earth might ensue, struck the youth with the thunderbolt and hurled him into the river Po in Italy. This heathen anecdote cannot be altogether an invention. There lies a truth at the bottom of it. Some irregularity in the sun's apparent diurnal course must have occurred at an early period of history; otherwise ancient heathens would have no foundation whereon to build their superstitious legend. And let us observe that where heathen testimony can be brought to corroborate revelation the testimony is invaluable; because it is the testimony of enemies. II. We proceed to show that THERE EXISTED AN ABSOLUTE NECESSITY FOR THE MIRACLE IN QUESTION BEING PERFORMED. Yes; there is an intimate connection between this miracle and the redemption which is in Jesus Christ. If sun and moon had not stood still at Joshua's command there would (on human calculation) have been no chance of salvation for a single member of our fallen race. If Israel had not had

sufficient light to guide them in pursuing their Canaanite enemies these enemies would have escaped during the darkness of the night. Had they escaped the five kings might have rallied; and, instead of Israel exterminating them, they might have exterminated Israel. Thus the advent of the promised Redeemer would have been prevented: for God had decreed that of Jacob's seed (in the line of Judah) Messiah should descend. No doubt the Divine plans have long been settled in the councils of eternity; and the Most High will take good care that Satan shall not defeat them. But then God employs second means to work His ends. He ordains every single step and event which will be conducive thereto in order that a single link may not be broken in the chain of His providential dealing. III. The conflict which Israel, under Joshua, had to maintain with the wicked nations of Canaan prefigured that deadlier conflict which we ourselves, under a greater than Joshua, have to keep up with the world, THE DEVIL, AND THE FLESH. To enable us to make head against these spiritual foes, who have in view nothing less than our destruction, God in mercy lengthens out the day. There is a spiritual sun, and there is a spiritual moon: even as there exist a literal sun and moon. God has set these moral luminaries in the spiritual firmament, to give such persons as have hitherto turned a deaf ear to the gospel space to believe it and be saved, ere it be too late; and also to afford light to those who already believe that they may continue firm to the end. (*John Caldwell, B.A.*) *How Joshua stopped the sun*:—For ages multitudes of Bible readers have seen in this narrative a stupendous miracle. Seeing the statement some have rebelled against it, and refused to believe it. Others have conscientiously striven to believe the statement, and defend it. Now, if a miracle is really declared to have taken place upon that day, its stupendous nature forms no objection whatever to my faith. Every miracle is to me stupendous, or else it is no miracle at all. Where God is concerned nothing is impossible. What objection then is there? The first, that such an act would seem, at any rate to be out of keeping with God's economy of power; it serves no direct purpose here. Mere flourishes of almightinesses are never found in the Bible. Every miracle in the Bible is a means to an end, and there is a proportion between the means and the end in view. There is no waste. I search the Bible in vain for any reference to the fact that the earth was stopped, or the sun stayed. I find no such reference at all. No use whatever is made of this in any other age, or in any other book. God led His people out of Egypt with a high hand, and the nation was cradled among miracles, and those miracles are appealed to time after time, age after age, to the end of the Bible. But there is a remarkable silence with regard to this. But my chief objection to the ordinary view is that I do not believe that the Bible says there was a miracle at all. I hold that, given a fair translation of this chapter, and an average amount of intelligence in the reader, and a reasonable freedom for traditional bias, the alleged stupendous miracle disappears entirely, and gives way to something far more valuable. And I claim that it is one of the inestimable and innumerable benefits conferred upon us by the Revised Translation of the Bible, that by its means the average reader can, without the help of any commentary, see at a glance how the case stood, and what really took place on that great day. Now, you will ask, What is the difference, then, between the Revised and the Old Version? Why, simply this. If you read this chapter in the Old Version the verses follow one another in unbroken continuity, and no hint whatever is given to the reader that when he arrives at the twelfth verse he is no longer reading what the author of the Book of Joshua himself wrote; he is not warned that the author, at the twelfth verse, breaks off from telling his own story, and introduces a quotation as a climax to the description of the battle, and that that quotation is a poetical one, taken from a book once popular, but now entirely lost, the Book of Jasher. If you read the Old Version it would seem to you that from the twelfth to the fifteenth verses is as much prose as the rest of the chapter, whereas in the Hebrew Bible, from the first, these verses were marked as a piece of quoted poetry; and in the Revised Version the thing is done almost in the same way. So that the reader who just looks at this chapter as it stands in the Revised Version will see that in the first part of the chapter he has to deal with history, and in this part he has to deal with poetry—a poetical quotation introduced by the historian as the climax of his description of the great battle of Bethhoron. Now it appears to me that this simple fact solves the difficulty entirely—relieves the faith of multitudes from a great burden; and, best of all, deprives a certain class of unbelievers of a very coarse but at the same time a very effective weapon. What have we here, then? Precisely what we have in many other parts of the Bible—

namely, two accounts of the same thing: one the sober account of the historian, and the other the more glowing account of the poet. For instance, you have the same thing in the Book of Judges. You will remember—for you are Bible readers—you remember the great battle of Mount Tabor. The Jews were groaning under the tyranny of Jabin, the king of Jerusalem, and at last there arose Deborah. She aroused Barak, Barak routed the army of Sisera; Jael completed Barak's work, and with a tent-pin and a hammer killed Sisera in her tent. This is the story of the battle of Mount Tabor, as told by the historian. But in the chapter next to it you will find the song of Deborah, and in that song an inspired poetess gives her account of the battle from the standpoint of the poet. She says: "They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera." It was Barak who did it, and Jael, and the tent-pin and the hammer. No, no; they fought out of heaven. "The stars in their courses," says Deborah, "fought against Sisera." Is there any man on the face of the earth that has ever stood up to say that because Deborah said that the battle of Mount Tabor was actually won by planetary impulses, therefore the stars really entered the Jewish army and fought against the oppressor? Who is there that does not see at once that in that case we have to deal with poetry? We have something like that even in the New Testament. Our Lord Jesus Christ said on the very first day when discipleship was born—He said to one of His first disciples—"Ye shall see the heavens opened, and the angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." Did they ever? Never, never. They never saw the blue rent; they never saw angels walking up and down the body of Christ. Never; it was a poetical form—a great mystical spiritual promise thrown into the larger language of poetry. And so the Gospel closes—"They shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing it shall do them no manner of harm." Is that being carried out in everybody or in anybody that believes the name of Christ? No, not literally. The serpent will kill a Christian as well as an infidel. Poison is as effective on a saint as on a sinner. What does it mean then? It is a grand spiritual fact, put in the large language of poetry. And that is what we have in this chapter. But you will say, Is not the Bible a serious book? Of what value is the introduction of a bit of poetry like this when it misleads so many? I reply—I. YES, THE BIBLE IS INTENSELY SERIOUS. This is not quoted as an ornament; it is for use. And if you ask, What is the value of it? I reply it is immensely valuable. Apart from this poetical quotation the whole chapter is comparatively worthless. Why? Because a body without a soul is worthless. The Bible is valuable to us in so far as it touches my life and yours. To tell me that Joshua routed those people does not help me very much. That is the body of it. I want to get at the soul of it. I want to understand Joshua himself, to modernise him, to make him a brother and to get some good out of him. Well, this bit of poetry helps me: this is the key to it. If I read this I see how the thing is done, and I see how I can do the same thing, in a measure, when I am called upon to do it. This piece of poetry is a window through which we can look into Joshua's heart. The great battle of Bethhoron was a battle that threatened to be a drawn battle. There stands the man on the ridge. The men have been running away faster than he has been able to pursue them, and at this moment it seemed as if nature were conspiring against him; as if he were not to have the usual hours of the day. A black, mysterious cloud was coming to help the people who were running away from him. Don't you understand the agony that would come into a man's soul at that moment?—the impassioned prayer that would go up to God from his heart—not to stretch the laws of nature till they crack—but to give him the usual day, to keep the sun from going down at noon. No child was Joshua, crying for the moon. No man with such sick fancies could have done the work he did. What this man prayed for was a fair day's light to do a fair day's work in the strength of and for the glory of God. And do not you know something of the fear that came over him? If you are trying to do any work you too will come to this point. It will seem to you as if God were going to make your day too short. You will see the night falling all too soon. The night cometh, and you will say, "Oh, for more light. Life is not long enough; I am being taken away in the very middle of my days." And you will then know what it is to cry, "Sun, stand thou in the heaven; and thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon." II. "AND THE SUN STOOD STILL, AND THE MOON STAYED, UNTIL THE NATION HAD AVENGED THEMSELVES." That is the key—"until the nation had avenged themselves." What was coming up from the Mediterranean was not some awful preternatural piece of night, as Joshua feared. It was only a shower: a hailstorm. It was not going to help his enemies, but to

slay them. The sun was not hasting from the heavens; the heavenly orbs would do their work as usual. The sun and moon were to be depended on; but if Joshua really wanted to have a longer day than usual, that did not depend on the sun and moon, he had to make it himself. How? Just as he lengthened the preceding night. From Gilgal to Gibeon, how long? Three days' journey. What did Joshua do? Why, he took the twelve hours and stretched them till they became thirty-six. He did three days' march in one night. So if Joshua wants a longer day on Beth-horon, it is not the sun that can make it for him, nor the moon either. He must go back on his recipe of the night before, and take the twelve hours of the day and stretch them. It is for Joshua himself to make the day longer, for it is not up in the skies that days are lengthened, but here on earth. The secret of a long day lies with Joshua, and not with the sun. No, the sun will not wait for you; but you can quicken your pace, and so lengthen your days. The longest day in your life is the day in which you work hardest, think the closest, live noblest. III. Is that all? No. WAS NOTHING DONE BY GOD? YES, EVERYTHING. "And there was no day like that," says the old poet, "before it, or after, that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man." By stopping the sun? No; "The Lord fought for Israel." That cloud coming up from the Mediterranean, that Joshua mistook for the night, was one of his own soldiers marching to meet him; it was one of his own allies. Nature herself was in league with him. It was the hailstorm, one of God's reinforcements coming to do the work of God. It is one of the deepest truths of experience that "all things work together for good to them that love God." The hailstorms are still in league with the Joshuas. Are you false and mean in your aims? Are your ways corrupt on the earth? Then I tell you, whoever you are, you may succeed for a while, or you may seem to succeed, as the tares that ripen in the autumn sun that the fire may burn them all the easier by and by. You may seem to suceeed for a while, but the very framework of the universe must be shattered; God's throne must crumble in decay; heaven itself must be carried at the assault of hell's dark troops before you can ultimately and really succeed. You too will be caught some day between Joshua and the hailstorm of the Lord. But are you seeking to be true, trying to be right, yet often finding things arrayed against you? Then, in God's name, go on. You misread the signals. The blackness that threatens you is only an ally in disguise. You are bound to succeed in the battle of the Lord. The nature of things is in league with righteousness. IV. "AND JOSHUA RETURNED INTO THE CAMP AT GILGAL." Did he know what he had done? No. He knew he had done something; that it had been a great day, but he had no idea how great it was. It was one of the thousand-year days of God. It is still with us. That sun that Joshua cried to is still shining, and the moon has never left the vale of Ajalon. Serve the Lord with all your might, and you will do a work greater than you imagine, or dream, or desire. Our time-tables are altogether wrong—sixty seconds to the minute, sixty minutes to the hour; that will do very well for the rough and tumble work in the city, but apply a time-table like that to Gethsemane. Read the Gospels, watch in hand, beneath the shadow of the Cross—"From the sixth to the ninth hour Jesus hung on the Cross, dying." Sixty minutes to the hour, sixty seconds to the minute! It will not do. These are eternal things, and they upset all our calculations. We do not know what we do when we serve God. Life is greater, grander than we dream. Do not think life is small. We sow time, and, lo, we reap eternity. We may so live as to leave behind us a light shining till the world itself shall end. "Returned to the camp." Ah, men and women, the pathos of that old phrase! You and I will return to the camp very soon. The day over. Well, you may arrest the sun before night; but the sun, once it has dipped beneath the western wave, cannot be brought back. Yesterday! Where is it? It is beyond, in the great eternity. Can you run after the lightning and catch it and bring it back? Sooner shall you do that than at the end of the day recover the sun that has set. We shall be returning to camp soon. What histories are we bringing back—you and I? The number of our days is with God; but the length, fulness, quality, and eternalness are with us. (*J. M. Gibbon.*)

Providential help:—1. We may learn whither to have recourse for help whenever the state of the weather has proved unfavourable to our respective undertakings. Is our land drenched with floods, that threaten to wash away or decay the seed lately sown? or chilled by cold and blighting winds? or parched up with a scorching heat, unmitigated by a passing cloud or a solitary shower? To complain and murmur under such visitations is as vain as it is impious; whereas prayer for their alleviation or removal will probably procure us God's favourable

consideration, and certainly work for our spiritual profit. 2. Again, we learn by what unlikely means the Almighty brings about the deliverance of His people and the discomfiture of His enemies. To promote this great end, all hearts are in His hand, all events are at His disposal; yea, He directs and controls the elements themselves, so as to extort from the sons of men the confession, "This is God's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes." What befell the Spanish Armada, fitted out for the invasion and conquest of Great Britain? "The Lord sent a great wind into the sea," to destroy the remnant of those ships which had hitherto escaped defeat; so that the final discomfiture of the fleet was as much owing to the tempestuous violence of the ocean as to the desperate valour of the English. However inextricable your difficulties, however insuperable your dangers may appear, the time for surmounting or escaping them may be at hand: your last extremity is God's gracious opportunity: the valley of Achor He is changing into the door of hope, and making the vast magazine of ordinary and extraordinary dispensations instrumental to your eventual happiness and eternal glory. But tremble, ye wicked, though peace and prosperity at present attend your path. The resources in the hand of a retributive Providence are leagued against you, which, if delayed now, will fall on your devoted heads with tripled weight hereafter. 3. But I may instance some still clearer points of resemblance between this special interference of the Almighty in the case of Joshua and His providential arrangements at the present day. Every year presents to us an appearance in the heavens as deserving our surprise and admiration as that which attracted the notice of the camp of Israel. From the depth of winter to the height of summer the sun gradually travels over a wider space in its daily course. Morning after morning it rises earlier; evening after evening later sets. At length it escapes our sight for a few hours only; and during that short interval the twilight in a great degree compensates for its absence. Lest, moreover, during winter nearly utter darkness should veil the skies, on account of the sun's few and contracted visits, the stars on frosty nights shine with a brilliancy unknown in summer, while the unclouded moon supplies its place, a welcome substitute, guided by whose friendly rays at any time the wanderer may confidently rely on reaching his place of destination. I scarcely need remind you what assistance this lesser light lends the labourer in late harvests by rising about the full at the same hour for some evenings in succession; or how, when the sun does not rise above their horizon for months together, and they would otherwise be enveloped in continual darkness, Divine Providence lights up for the inhabitants of the polar regions the brilliant aurora borealis, or northern lights, to illumine and cheer their "noonday nights." Is not as effectual a provision made for light by these contrivances as though the sun and moon in set terms stood still, and hasted not to go down about a whole day? Are they not as hard to be accounted for? 4. By comparing this miracle wrought by the hand of Joshua with those performed by Jesus Christ, we may learn to ascribe all proper honour to His person, all due reverence to the religion He came hither to establish. (*H. A. Herbert, B.A.*) *The sun standing still:*—A new suggestion in regard to the standing still of the sun and the moon at the apostrophe of Joshua is given by the Rev. J. Sutherland Black in his edition of "Joshua," issued as one part of the Smaller Cambridge Bible series. His new postulate is to the effect that no physical miracle occurred, or was desired; he thinks the cosmical features of the event do not touch upon the supernatural at all. His explanation runs thus: "To understand the quotation from the Book of Jasher, we must figure to ourselves the speaker at two successive periods of the summer day—first on the plateau to the north of the hill of Gibeon, with Gibeon lying under the sun to the south-east or south, at the moment when the resistance of the enemy has at last broken down, and again, hours later, when the sun has set, and the moon is sinking westward over the valley of Ajalon, threatening by its disappearance to put an end to the victorious pursuit. The appeal to the moon is, of course, for light—*i.e.*, after sunset. The moon appears over Ajalon; that is somewhat south of west, as seen by one approaching from Beth-horon. There was, therefore, evening moonlight. Joshua prayed first that the sunlight, and then that the moonlight following it, might suffice for the complete defeat of the enemy." *The desire and the improvement of life:*—It is the language of the passions, in the midst of a fervid and impetuous career. "Sun, stand thou still," equally exclaim the sons of pleasure and of ambition: every rank, pursuit, and age joins in the same prayer. In the morning of our existence, when all things display their fairest aspect, and in the midst of a succession of pleasurable scenes time rolls rapidly

along: should a moment of reflection intervene, who does not exclaim, with a sigh, "How brief, how vain is life! how silently and swiftly do the hours advance and vanish!" "O sun, stand thou still"; give us a few more of thy bright morning beams, that we may a little longer taste the sweetness of unsullied pleasure. When we advance to the noon of the human course; amidst all the weighty cares, the thronging projects and objects of strenuous pursuit, that by turns awaken our ardour and elude our expectation—if, amidst this busy scene, we throw a glance upon the enlarged and enlarging space we have already passed, and the short and shortening limits of that which remains—how naturally does the heart send forth the involuntary, fruitless wish, "'Sun, stand thou still.' Hasten not so precipitately to crush our aspiring hopes, and extinguish in untimely darkness our unripened purposes: shine a little longer in thy meridian brightness, that we may not only exert our strength, but reap some recompense of our toil." Arrived at this period of imaginary tranquility—though many ties may be loosened which once bound us to the world, yet new objects of attachment rise, and new motives for wishing that our stay might be prolonged—or if expectation saddens, and all around the prospect grows more dim and desolate, still do we linger fondly on the verge of life, though bereft of its most valued comforts, from that unconquerable dread with which the untried and unknown future strikes the imagination. "O sun, stop, stop thy course. Stand thou still in the midst of heaven, yet another year, another day, to soften our removal from the cheerful light, from the society of our fellow-beings, that, with more composed and collected thoughts, we may stand before the tribunal of our Creator." Thus various and inexhaustible are the excuses of each successive stage for wishing to lengthen out the brief span of life; and the same sentiment pervades all the different conditions and circumstances of mankind. If prosperity smile upon us, we think the sun, which lights us every day to a succession of pleasures, moves too quickly to his setting: "O sun, stand thou still" in the midst of this fair horizon—hasten not to draw the veil of night over these delightful prospects. And if adversity oppress our spirits, we complain that the days which are clouded with grief, like those which are illumined with joy, equally pass away never to return. "O Sun, stand thou still," let the dark and lowering tempest pass from before thy refulgent orb: let thy sweet and pleasant light again gladden our hearts, that our few remaining hours may glide peacefully to the close. But if he, who, without his own fault, and by inevitable circumstances, has been deprived of happiness, may complain of the swiftness of time and the brevity of life, how much deeper regret must that man feel who is conscious of having wasted its most valuable seasons, in thoughtless inactivity! Well may he cry out to time, to suspend its course, "Sun, stand thou still," or rather reverse thy flaming and impetuous career. On the other hand, the virtuous man. But who is so virtuous as to have no faults to repair, no defects to supply—the man, however, comparatively virtuous, whose youthful days have been introductory to a scene of honourable and useful exertion; who may justly look upon himself as a blessing to his fellow-creatures; and who is pursuing, with steady vigour, his well-chosen course; gradually extending his usefulness and his good affections; and is a progressive pattern of every social and every religious duty; though he may submissively await the Divine disposal, yet will he view, not without awe, the narrow space which even virtue itself can boast of here below; and will be almost tempted to wish that it might be the will of Divine Providence to protract the duration of a span so brief, so inadequate to his views and his desires: "'Sun, stand thou still'; withdraw not thy precious and useful light so soon; let me still pursue the happy course on which I have entered." Unavailing are all such wishes; the tide of time will be neither accelerated nor retarded by our entreaties; the sun will neither suspend nor deviate from his course. Since, therefore, we cannot rule the course of nature, let us endeavour to rule ourselves. If we are so unhappy as to have wasted our past hours in folly or to have abused them by misconduct it is in vain to sit down and fold our arms in melancholy inaction; wishing that the past might be recalled, and grieving that the future cannot be hindered from advancing. We should rather call upon our souls and all that is within us to amend our faults, and repair the ills we have thereby incurred, before it be too late; like travellers who having wandered from the right path hasten to regain it before the sun goes down. If, on the contrary, we have happily chosen the path of virtue, let us cheerfully and thankfully pursue our way. Pleasant but fleeting is the season of youth, life's cheerful morning. You cannot prolong its absolute duration; but you can add inestimably to its value. You can extend its happy influence over every

remaining period, and draw from it a rich harvest of knowledge, virtue, and true felicity. Youth is the blossom, the promise of mature years—these are equally transitory with the former. In vain you implore the sun to stay, but you may call him to witness a train of pious and charitable actions as he passes; you may crowd into a small extent a multitude of valuable labours; it is not for us to fix the limits, but to fulfil the duties of life—well pleased to act in concert with the great first mover of all things, among the innumerable instruments of His benevolent designs, and not unwilling to cease from action, whenever He shall see fit to transfer the pleasing though arduous toil from ourselves to others. No sooner has the sun passed his meridian than the shadows lengthen and night approaches. The dawn, the noon, the evening, all glide with uninterrupted speed; and the hour when we must bid farewell to all their successive scenes nature cannot now long delay. All that remains is, by reason and reflection, by prayer and repentance, to calm the perturbation of our minds—by holy resignation to the will of God, and a cheerful performance of our remaining duties, to seek His aid and protection—then, though we cannot escape the stroke of death, we shall render it less painful and alarming; thus disarmed of its sting, it will lose its greatest terrors; and will appear somewhat like a sound and refreshing slumber, falling on the over-wearied mariner, who is within sight of his desired haven, and who expects, with the dawn of the succeeding day, to meet the glad congratulations of all whom he loves. (*P. Houghton.*) *Sun, stand thou still*:—"Oh," you say, "the sun and moon didn't stand still." One man comes to me and says, "According to the Copernican system the sun stood still anyhow, and it was no miracle for it to stand still." Another man says, "If you stop the sun, you upset the whole universe, and throw everything out of order." Another man tells me it was only the refraction of the sun's rays which made the sun seem to stand still. Another man tells me that all that was necessary to have this miracle right, was to stop the world on its own axis, and it was not necessary to stop it in its revolution through its orbit. The universe is only God's watch. I suppose He could make it. Then I suppose He could stop it. Then I suppose He could start it again, and stop it again. Oh! not the sun standing still! Yes. A bad man does not live out half his days. His sun may set at noon. But a good man may prolong his days of usefulness. If a man, in the strength of Joshua, will go forth to fight against sin and in behalf of the truth, he shall live; a thousand years will be as one day. John Summerfield was a consumptive Methodist. He stood looking fearfully white in Old Sand Street Methodist Church, preaching the glorious gospel, and on the anniversary platform in New York pleading for the Bible until the old book unrolled new glories the world had never seen. And on his death-bed he talked of heaven until the wing of the angelic messenger brushed the pillow on which he lay. Has John Summerfield's sun set? Has John Summerfield's day ended? No! He lives in the burning words he uttered in behalf of the Christian Church. He lives in the fame of that Christ whom he recommended to the dying people. He lives in the eternal raptures of that heaven into which he has already introduced so many immortal souls. Faint, and sick, and dying, and holding with one hand to the rail of the altar of the Methodist Church, with the other hand he arrested the sun in the heavens, seeming to say, "I can't die now; I want to live on, and live on; I want to speak a word for Christ that will never die; I am only twenty-seven years of age. Sun of my Christian ministry, stand still over America." And it stood still. Robert M'Cheyne, of Scotland, was a consumptive Presbyterian. He used to cough in his sermon so hard that the people thought that he would never preach again; but thousands in Aberdeen, and Edinburgh, and Dundee, heard the voice of mercy from his lips. The people rejoiced under his ministry. His name to-day is fragrant in all Christendom, and that name is mightier than ever was his living presence. The delirium of his last sickness was filled with prayer, and when in his dying moment he lifted his hand for a benediction upon his friends, and upon his country, he was only practically saying, "I can't die now; I want to live on for Christ; I am only thirty years of age. Sun of my Christian ministry, stand still over Scotland." And it stood still. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) No day like that.—*High days*:—I. THERE HAD BEEN NONE LIKE IT IN THE NUMBER AND STRENGTH OF THE CONFEDERACY WHICH WAS GATHERED AGAINST ISRAEL. The highlanders, and lowlanders, and the maritime tribes combined their forces to oppose and crush the invaders, who now, by the defection of Gibeon, possessed a pathway into the heart of the country. Israel had previously dealt with separate

cities, Jericho, Ai, Gibeon; but now six of the seven nations of Canaan joined together at the summons of the king of Jerusalem, who was allied with the kings of Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon. II. THERE WAS NONE LIKE IT IN JOSHUA'S LIFE FOR HEROIC FAITH. 1. It was a day of vigour. As soon as he received the message he saw the importance of at once vindicating the trust reposed in him. Inertness and indolence ill become those who are entrusted with great concerns. The stirring of God's Spirit in man makes the pulse throb quickly, purposes form themselves in the will; and all the nature is braced, and knit, to subserve the heroic soul. 2. It was a day of fellowship. Soon after the first message had come, with surely a certain amount of startling surprise, God had spoken to him and said, "Fear them not," &c. And so we may expect it to be always. Sometimes the assurance comes first to prepare us for what is at hand. But if not then it will reach us simultaneously with the alarm, reassuring us, and giving us quiet confidence in the midst of evil tidings, as the bird rocks in its nest over the rush of the waterfall, serene, though the branch beneath it sways in the storm. There are high days in human lives when thought and purpose, which had been quietly gathering strength, like waters swelling against a barrier, suddenly leap from their leash, and vent themselves in acts, or words, or prayers, such as stand out from the ordinary routine of existence, like the cathedral of Cologne from the mean houses that gather around its base. We are not, then, drunk with wine, but we are flushed, as to our spirits, with the exhilaration and sense of power which the Spirit of God alone can give, or, to put it in another form, we catch fire. There is too little experience of this capacity of rising into the loftiest experience of that Spirit life which is within the reach of us all, through living fellowship with God; but whenever we realise and use it, it is as when the feeble, smouldering wick is plunged into oxygen gas, or as when a flower, that had struggled against the frost, is placed in the tropical atmosphere of the hot-house. In such hours we realise what Jesus meant when He said, "Whosoever shall say unto this mountain," &c. 3. It was a day of triumphant onlook. The kings were summoned from their hiding-place, and as they crouched abjectly at the feet of their conquerors, Joshua called for all the men of Israel, and said unto the chiefs of the men of war, "Come near, put your feet upon the necks of these kings." And whilst they stood in that attitude of unquestioned victory, there broke on the exalted spirit-kindled imagination of the warrior-chieftain the sure prevision of the ultimate issue of the conflict in which they were engaged. He already saw the day when every knee should bow before Jehovah's might, when every king should be prostrate before Israel's arm, and when the whole land should be subdued. III. THERE HAD BEEN NONE LIKE IT IN THE EXTRAORDINARY CO-OPERATION OF JEHOVAH. The Israelites were the executioners of Divine justice, commissioned to give effect to the sentence which the foul impurities of Canaan called for. There is a judgment-seat for nations as well as for individuals. Within the limits of the ages as they pass, and on the surface of this earth, that throne is erected and that judgment is proceeding. We get some glimpse of this in the hand that wrote the doom of Belshazzar's kingdom on the walls of the palace which beheld a scene of wanton revelry lit by the light of the temple's sacred lamps. And the almighty Judge sees to it that His sentences are carried out. He has many agents—the Persian legions to execute his sentence on Babylon, the Vandals on Rome, the Russian Cossacks on Napoleon, as the Israelites on the Amorites, whose iniquity was now full, and threatened to infect the world. IV. SUCH DAYS COME STILL TO MEN. There are days in our lives so extraordinary for the combination of difficult circumstances, human opposition, and Satanic combination, that they stand out in unique terror from the rest of our lives. Looking back on them, we may almost adopt the language of the sacred historian, "there was no day like that before it or after it." But these days do not come if we are living in friendship with God, intent on doing His will, without there coming also His sweet "Fear them not, for I have delivered them into thine hands." Our only anxiety should be that nothing should divert us from His path, or intercept the communication of His grace. Like a wise commander we must keep open the passage back to our base of operations, which is God. Careful about that, we need have no anxious care beside. The greatness of our difficulties is permitted to elicit the greatness of His grace. He covers our heads in the day of battle. He is our shield and exceeding great reward. Though an host should encamp against us, we will not fear; though war should rise against us, in this we will be confident. Moreover, these days may always be full of the realised presence of God. All through the conflict Joshua's heart was in perpetual fellowship with the mighty

Captain of the Lord's host, who rode beside him all the day. The blessed colloquy between the two was unbroken, as between a Wellington and a Blucher, a Napoleon and a Marshal Ney. So amid all our conflicts, our hearts and minds should thither ascend and there dwell where Christ is seated, drawing from Him grace upon grace, as we need, like the diver on the ocean floor who inhales the fresh breeze of the upper air. At these times it is very necessary not merely to ask God to help us, because the word "help" may mean that there is a great deal of reliance on self, and whatever there is of ourselves is almost certain to give way in the strain of battle. Achilles was mortally wounded in the heel, the one place which did not share in the plunge given him by his goddess mother into the immortal stream. The Divine part of our deliverance will be nullified by the alloy of our own energy, strength, or resolution. Let us substitute for the word "help" the word "keep." Let us put the whole matter into the hands of God, asking Him to go before us, to fight for us, to deliver us, as He did for His people on this eventful day. "The Lord discomfited them before Israel." (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*)

Vers. 15–27. **Bring out those five kings.**—*The prostrate kings:*—The kings of the Canaanites fled and hid themselves, but the Divine vengeance followed them; and after the rout of their hosts was completed they themselves were taken and put to death. Before this, however, they were humbled in the sight of Israel; and the captains were bidden by Joshua to put their feet on the necks of their foes. Thus their thorough subjection was pointed out; and the people of God were distinguished as triumphing over all opposition, even the most formidable. I. NO OPPOSITION IS SO GREAT, NO ENEMIES SO MIGHTY, BUT THE FOLLOWERS OF THE LORD JESUS CAN OVERCOME THEM. In outward and bodily things, and at the hands of men, the people of God are ofttimes sorely tried. Over and over again they have been slain all the day, and accounted as sheep for the slaughter. The deep and mysterious providence of an all-wise God has suffered and ordered this. But inwardly, and as regards spiritual experience, is it not true that "We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us"? As believers in Jesus we are exposed to constant opposition of a spiritual kind. As soon as ever the Christian life really begins, so soon does conflict commence. But is it not a good thing to change slavery for freedom; and to feel the opposition and rage of Satan rather than to be bound in his destructive chains? Then again, the rebel flesh puts forth its power, resisting the will of God, and proving that the carnal mind is enmity against God. But have we not found deliverance? We have heard the precious assurance, "No weapon formed against thee shall prosper"; we have taken up the Christian's war-cry, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me"; we have doubtless sung the believer's song of triumph, "Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Do I now speak to any soul in strong conflicts, and exposed to some sore temptation? Oh! poor tried and harassed one, look up, look up. Do not let the enemy engage all your attention: think of the mighty Friend who is standing by. Do not let the temptation quite swallow up your spirit; remember (1 Cor. x. 13). II. IT IS THE LORD JESUS WHO ACCOMPLISHES THIS GLORIOUS WORK FOR AND IN BEHALF OF HIS BELIEVING ONES. Mark the circumstances in detail which are narrated in the text, and see how conspicuous Joshua was throughout the whole transaction (vers. 22–26). Joshua called for all the men, summoned the host, then called out the captains, and bade them put their feet on the necks of the kings; then he encouraged his captains; then he executed the kings. The crowning speech, and crowning act, on that eventful day were his. Just so, it is only our heavenly Joshua who can make us conquerors, who can effect deliverance for us, who can enable us to set our feet upon the necks of those hosts, those temptations, those foes of whatsoever sort, which surround and assault us, and which, without His aid, are sure to be too many and too mighty for us to cope with and subdue. 1. In the help which we have received, or may now be enjoying, let us see the pledge of future victory. 2. It may be that some are in sore conflict and trial at this very time. Forget not who is able to save, even to the uttermost. The same Jesus who has strengthened thousands of conflicting souls and made them victorious is ready to help you. (*C. D. Marston, M.A.*) *Foes under foot:*—1. This solemn scene reminds us of the mad resistance of these kings. Here is the end of it. And what a contrast is this to that which they had conceived. As we look on these wretched kings we hear a voice asking in earnest, solemn tones, "Who hath hardened himself against God and hath prospered?" "Who can resist the arm of the Almighty?" And

again it says, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." Can the clay rebel against the potter? Will the tool lift up itself against the workman? Will worms defy the Almighty? Why, then, oh! why are there found, not a few, but many, who still resist Him? 2. This scene also reminds us of the despairing flight of these kings. Finding that resistance was useless, they sought to escape by flight, but this proved also vain. The sinner cannot flee from the judgment of God. Many a man has been able to escape the just judgment of his fellows. It can never be so with the Divine justice. It rolls forth no empty thunders. Seeing all flight is vain, our only hope is instant and complete submission, if haply the Lord will have mercy on us and spare us for His name's sake. 3. The scene also speaks of their useless refuge. Their resistance was found to be utterly vain, therefore they had recourse to flight. But flight they found also unavailing, therefore they sought to hide, but this was also vain. By this new device they not only deceive themselves, they actually destroy themselves. Know that it is as vain to hide from God as to fly from Him. Yet the truth, "Thou God seest me," is one not easily learned. Often, as in the case of Hagar, it is only in the hour of dire extremity that the soul becomes truly conscious of the fact. Nothing is more common or more natural for fallen man than to hide from God. Even in childhood, if unwelcome thoughts of God obtruded themselves, how quickly did we learn to bury ourselves in the cave of other and more congenial thoughts and hopes. And as we grow older, and the heart gets more unsusceptible to spiritual realities, how easily can we hide in indifference. How natural it is to let slip everything that has been taught us of spiritual truth, to forget all warnings and admonitions, to become engrossed with the pleasures that lie around, and to forsake the good habits in which we had been trained. And not a few seek to shelter themselves in hypocrisy. The Church is the garden of God; and not a few are hiding from Him among the trees of His own garden. They come to the solemn assembly. They give of their substance to His work. They maintain propriety of conduct, and yet they know not God; yea, they are hiding from Him all the time, and by these very means. Others are hiding from God in business. From Monday morning till Saturday night they are engrossed in earthly cares, and even on the Lord's day their heads and hearts are more in their bank-books and ledgers than in their Bibles. But though men may for a few moments bury themselves in oblivion of God, they can never hide from Him. Soon the souls who thus hide will be dragged out to the bewildering light, to their shame and ruin. Have we, then, no hope? Is there no refuge for us? There is. We can never hide from God, but we can hide in God. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it and is safe." 4. Here also we behold the utter degradation of these kings. It was far deeper than that of their subjects. As they were ringleaders in this revolt, their end was more terrible. They had to bow their necks under the feet of the children of Israel. This was a most significant act. It was a picture of the absolute subjection of all to the yoke of Israel. It was a pledge of the perfect conquest of the land, of the glorious ending of that work which had been so well begun. This also was written for our encouragement and instruction. All things must be brought into subjection to the true Joshua. They who follow Him are not overcome of evil, they are conquerors in the struggle against sin. However weak we may feel in ourselves, yet in His name we dare deal with the proudest and strongest sin that lurks in our hearts, as Joshua's captains did with these kings. That man cannot be following Christ who is not putting all spiritual foes under his feet from day to day. And we have here not only a picture of this daily and oft-repeated triumph over sin which Jesus gives His followers, but also a picture of that ultimate and complete victory over sin and Satan that shall be granted. There were other kings in Canaan besides these five kings, and they gave Joshua and his captains much trouble. Though the victory so far was real and glorious, it was by no means complete. They have faced and overcome these particular foes; but many more remain. Even so the Christian, though he should and must obtain the victory over all known sin, and keep it ever under foot, learns the longer that he lives that there are other sins which he had not dreamt of lurking in the recesses of his heart. Therefore he lays count for a protracted war. Yet he does not go forward with a faint heart to face these new foes. Rather, encouraged by the victories already granted, he goes on with assurance of like triumph. 5. We must also draw attention to the miserable end of these kings. Here, as we stand over the dead bodies of these kings, we hear a voice proclaiming, "So perish the king's enemies." There are judgments of God against sin in the past history of the world. In the future history of the world these judgments will again be on the

earth. Between the past and the future He has erected the Cross. That also is a centre of judgment. Yea, the judgment against sin on the Cross is far more perfect than either that judgment which goes before or follows after; for it is a judgment finished, a cup of condemnation drunk to the last drop, and that can be said of no other, past or future. Identified with that Victim, nailed with Him to that Cross, cursed in Him with all the curse due to sin, banished with that forsaken Victim in the great darkness, there is no condemnation, no judgment, to them that are in Christ Jesus. 6. In these conquests of Joshua we have a faint picture of the victories of Jesus. However numerous His enemies may be, they will be all scattered as chaff before the wind, as smoke before the hurricane. However mighty they may be, they will bite the dust in terror and dismay. However wise and noble, they will be crushed under His heel. (*A. B. Mackay.*) *Five kings*:—You all know something of a struggle that is continually going on in your own hearts between good and evil. You have all heard of the battle against sin. Well, the five kings are for us five sins, which day by day are warring against us. And let us be quite sure of this, if we do not conquer them they will conquer us. I. Here is the first—KING ANGER. What boy or girl is there who has not felt this king rising in his heart, and leading him on to unkind words and bad deeds. Kill the very first angry thought, and then it won't have time to grow into a great king to trouble you and all near you. II. "But," says some child, "I'm not given to being angry. I have a very good temper. I'm not afraid of that king." Don't be too sure. He may turn up some time when you are not ready for him. And in any case I fear, from the way you speak, that there is another king you will have to keep a very good look-out against—KING PRIDE. Do you know what he is? Some one gave a very good description of pride when he said that pride was a great big "I" and a very little "you." Some of you, I am sure, have read "Alice in Wonderland"; and you remember what happened to Alice when she ate the piece of cake marked, "Eat me." She found herself growing taller, and taller, and taller, until at length everything looked quite small beneath her. Now King Pride does for us all what the wonderful cake did for Alice. He puffs us up. He makes us very high and very great in our own sight. And the only way to deal with him is to do like Joshua's soldiers, and to take this king and put our foot upon his neck, and crush him to the ground. III. But we must pass on to our third king; and dangerous as were the first two, he is more dangerous still, for his name is KING FALSEHOOD. Have you ever told a lie, ever said what was not quite true to get your own way, or to save yourself from punishment? If you have, then you are letting King Falsehood reign over you, and a cruel, hard master you will soon find him to be. Determine at all costs to say nothing but what is strictly true. Once a great and good man was thrown into prison because he had written a paper which displeased King Charles I. He was tried and condemned to death for what he had written; but the king sent messengers to him in prison to say that if he would only deny having written the paper and signed it, he would be set free. And how do you think he answered? "I did sign that paper. I could save my life by telling a lie, but I would rather a thousand times tell the truth, even though my life must be the cost." That was noble. Be like that hero, Algernon Sydney. IV. Our fourth king need not detain us long—KING DISOBEDIENCE. He needs no explanation, but perhaps you will remember best about him if I tell you how he was once conquered by a brave English boy. Henry Havelock was his name, and at twelve o'clock one day his father left him on London Bridge, and told him to wait till he came back. One hour, two hours, three hours passed, and still the father did not come; but King Disobedience did. "Why wait any longer?" he whispered to Henry. "Your father has forgotten you, and will not expect you to remain. It is quite excusable to disobey him now after all these hours. You had better run home." But the boy would not consent. He had been told to wait till his father came, and like a soldier's son he drove the enemy back at every point. At seven o'clock that evening his wife asked General Havelock, "Where is Henry? I have not seen him all the afternoon." The General started up. "Oh," he said, "he's on London Bridge! I left him there at twelve o'clock, and told him to wait for me. In the hurry of business I quite forgot about him. But he's there still, I'm sure." And there indeed he was when his father went to fetch him. Seven long, weary hours he had waited, and fought King Disobedience. And hard though the battle had been he had won. V. And now there remains only one king; but he is so big and so strong that I shall ask the printer to print his name in extra large letters—KING SELF. Have you ever heard two voices inside you; one saying,

"Please yourself. Take your own way. Why should you think about other people?" And the other saying, "No, be generous; be kind. Give up what pleases yourself, and help others." I think you have, and I think you know which is the voice of King Self, and what a poor sort of a king he is to follow. He can make no one happy. Somehow the boy who is always trying to please himself is the boy who is never pleased at all. And then how uncomfortable he makes all round him. It was only because God had helped him that Joshua was able to defeat the five kings. And so shall we conquer if we fight in God's strength, not in our own. Kneel down to Him then, and ask Him to be with you, and to make you "more than conquerors" for Jesus' sake. (*Morning Rays.*) *Five modern kings*:—The names of the places may help us to consider the nature of their respective kings. 1. "The king of Jerusalem." That such a king should have been slain works violently in our memory and whole thought, for "Jerusalem" means peace—the city of peace, the restful city, the sabbatic metropolis, the home of rest. But is there not a false peace? The king of false peace must be slain. He has ruled over some of us too long. 2. "Hebron" means conjunction, joining, alliance. Is not the king of false fellowship to be killed? What concord hath Christ with Belial? God has always been against unholy alliances. Many a man He has, so to say, arrested with the words, Why this conjunction? What right have you to be here, pledging your character to sustain a known dishonesty? 3. And the king of Jarmuth. The word means high, that which is lifted up. And is not the king of false ambition to be slain and then hanged—to have contempt added to murder? Contempt is never so well expended as upon false ambition. 4. Then the king of Lachish. The word means hard to be captured, almost out of reach, or so defended that it will be almost impossible to get at the king. Is not the king of fancied security to be slain and hanged? 5. King of Eglon. The word "Eglon" means pertaining to a calf, and may be taken as representing the whole system of false worship. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Vers. 28–43. **All these kings and their land did Joshua take at one time, because the Lord . . . fought for Israel.**—*Divine sovereignty*:—I. GOD HAS AN INDISPUTABLE RIGHT TO DISPENSE HIS FAVOURS TO WHAT PERSONS AND IN WHAT PROPORTIONS HE PLEASES. As the sole proprietor, it is His to dispose of. 1. Worldly goods. One is accordingly born to affluence, while another is cradled in poverty. Before they existed they could, of course, have no claims or demerits; and therefore the difference in their lot must be owing to His sovereign disposal of events. 2. Bodily constitution and health. As variety marks all other of God's works, so here it happens that one is naturally robust, another sickly, a third deformed, &c. Who is it that maketh the strong, the beautiful, &c., to differ? The answer may be found in 2 Sam. xxii. 30, 35. 3. Mental qualifications. "The inspiration of the Almighty giveth understanding." Much, it is true, depends on personal application. But much depends on natural capacity; given "to one five talents, to another two, and to another one"; and much on the opportunities, instructors, &c., which God either gives or withholds. 4. Spiritual privileges. Mankind soon began to have greater or smaller advantages in this respect, as they descended from families more or less holy; and the case is the same to the present day. Instance the Israelites and heathens formerly; Christians and pagans now. II. GOD HAS AN EQUAL RIGHT TO RESUME OR TO TRANSFER HIS FAVOURS. 1. We have seen that whatever we possess is of free favour at first, from the original proprietor of all. Such the acknowledgment of the psalmist, "Of Thine own have I given Thee." 2. No person becomes a proprietor of his possessions merely because he has long enjoyed them. Every blessing is a loan resumable at pleasure; and instead of gaining a right by holding it, the holder is becoming more and more indebted. The property is still God's (Psa. xxiv. 1, l. 10, 12). 3. On this ground He took His own land of promise from the Canaanites and transferred it to Israel. And He still puts down one and raises up another as it pleases Him. III. GOD MAY JUSTLY PUNISH EVERY VOLUNTARY TRANSGRESSION OF HIS RIGHTEOUS AND EQUITABLE LAWS. Here we remark—1. That His intelligent and moral creatures are what they are is owing to His sovereign pleasure. Thus Elihu (Job xxxv. 10, 11). 2. Since they are such, and capable of moral government, their nature requires a law, as a test of their obedience and for the exercise of their capabilities; and it is His prerogative, who is not only the sovereign Lord, but infinitely wise, to say what is right, to enact such law. 3. In order to make the law efficient it was necessary it should be guarded and enforced by penal sanctions. Whence it follows—4. That truth requires, while sovereignty authorises, the just punishment of disobedience to

His righteous and equitable commands. IV. IN EXECUTING HIS RIGHTEOUS PURPOSES GOD MAY EMPLOY WHAT AGENCY OR INSTRUMENTALITY HE PLEASES. He doubtless can and may work immediately on any and every part of His creation. Yet He seldom does so. Oftentimes He employs angels, as in the case of Sennacherib or Herod. And oftentimes storm, pestilence, earthquake, &c. Deists do not object to these. Yet they cavil at God's employing the sword of Israel; a difference merely in the circumstance of instrumentality. Let the subject teach us—1. Reverence. "Forasmuch as there is none like unto Thee, O Lord," &c. (Jer. x. 6, 7). The opposite disposition is reproved (Rom. ix. 20), and threatened (Isa. xlv. 9, 10). 2. Dependence. We enjoy no more or longer than He blesses us, and live no longer than He sustains (Psa. xc. 3, 14, civ. 27–29). 3. Humility. "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom," &c. (Jer. ix. 23, 24; 1 Cor. iv. 7). 4. Gratitude. Who maketh thee to differ? (*Sketches of Sermons.*) **Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, unto the camp to Gilgal.**—*The old camp and the new foe:*—It must have been a great rest and refreshment for the weary warriors to come to such a camp from time to time. It would be to them a Sabbath amid their arduous labours. From this place they would after each visit go more boldly out to deal harder blows against the uncircumcised Canaanites. And it is the same with us in the war which we wage against the inner and the outer foe. We have our headquarters too, a visit to which should stimulate us even more than a visit to Gilgal did the Israelites. What is our Gilgal? The Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. That remains always our centre. We should come back to it at all times; not only when driven there by defeat, in order to have shelter, but also after every victory, in order to give thanks. Thus shall we maintain faith and a good conscience. Then issuing from such headquarters, so safe, so restful, so hallowed, so purifying, we shall be filled with a holy enthusiasm and unconquerable strength, and march like Israel from victory to victory. When Joshua had come back to the old headquarters word was brought to him of the gathering of a new foe. This was the most numerous army that had as yet been gathered against him. And it was the most powerful, as well as the most numerous army which Joshua had encountered. For the first time in this campaign we hear of war-horses being used, and the war-chariots of iron which were such a terror to the ancient infantry. This army is also better led than any other that had taken the field. Jabin was the commander-in-chief. One of his successors is called king of Canaan (Judges iv. 2–24), and therefore he would in all likelihood have been the head of the great confederacy. The word "Jabin" is not a name, but a title borne by the kings of Hazor, and signifies "The Wise," just as Adonizedek means "Lord of Righteousness." Therefore, as we have seen the religious head of the Canaanites marshalling the southern army, so here we see the wise head of the Canaanites marshalling the northern army. The southern might be called the coalition of the priest; the northern the coalition of the sage. How graphically is the spiritual experience of the Christian depicted by these conflicts! No sooner is one set of foes subdued than another arises. There is no rest here. There is also a similarity in the kind of opposition which we have to encounter. As the advance of Israel was opposed now by Adoni-zedek and now by Jabin, so the advance of truth is opposed now by apostate Christianity and now by pompous philosophy. As it is with the Church collectively so is it with the individual. He may lay his account sooner or later to face these two, often in the same order. First comes superstition, with its high-sounding titles, its endless genealogies, its imperious claims, its elaborate ritual, its sensuous will-worship, its irrational bondage. It is resisted, it is overcome. Then comes rationalism, and it cries, "Well done. You have routed these infernal hosts. Now come with us. Finish the work you have so well begun. Cast from you the remaining rags of superstition. Follow the light of Reason. Shake off the remaining fetters and be free." Then the sage who argues thus will, like Jabin, muster whole hosts of imposing arguments. How quickly they come at his bidding: from north, south, east, and west, like the sand that is on the seashore for multitude. And when he reviews them, how imposing is their array! It is a critical time for the soul when he stands gazing on that imposing array, if he is not assured that the Lord is on his side; if he hears not, as did Joshua, the words, "Be not afraid because of them, to-morrow will I deliver them up all slain before Israel." But for faith in the Divine presence and this sure word the soul is in a sad case, and with quaking heart and tottering knees will quit the high places of the field. Alas! alas! how many in our day are dazed by the hosts of unsanctified science! The Christian soldier is not worthy of his name who is not ready with unfeigned faith in the truth of God to proclaim it boldly, whether men

hear or forbear, to oppose all the glittering phalanxes of false philosophy with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. As we look at this new army mustered to oppose Joshua, we cannot but renew our wonder at the infatuation of the Canaanites. What a solemn thought it is that the greatest miracles will not in themselves lead the heart of man to subjection! Yet, after all, why should we wonder at these Canaanites, when we have greater cause for wonder in the unbelief of many around us? What were all the miracles of which these Canaanites were cognisant compared with those with which we have been familiar since our childhood? (*A. B. Mackay.*)

CHAPTER XI.

VERS. 1–23. When Jabin king of Hazor had heard.—*Take heed how ye hear:*—I. HEARING AND NOT HEARING. The tidings of the overthrow of Sihon and Og, and the fall of Jericho, seem to have made almost no impression on the sleepy King of Hazor. II. HEARING, BUT HEARING IN VAIN. When Ai fell there seems to have been a general movement all through Canaan west of Jordan (chap. ix. 1). Before Jabin had gathered the northern legions southern Canaan had been destroyed. III. HEARING, AND HEARING TO RUIN. When Jabin did exert himself, it was but to proceed straight to destruction. Thus do the wicked delay heedlessly, awaken slowly, and finally bestir themselves to anticipate judgment. (*F. G. Marchant.*) **Be not afraid because of them.**—*Divine directions for the fight:*—I. The directions which God gave Joshua on this occasion were prefaced by WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT according to the Divine custom. Though Jehovah is not to interpose with mighty power as on former occasions, yet He supports and strengthens His servant with timely encouragement. Nothing could be better timed than these words as a preparation for the work that had to be done. Joshua had been made fully acquainted with the foe. His scouts have returned covered with dust, and reported the position and numbers and equipment of this new enemy. As these particulars were all told we can imagine that the boldest held his breath for a time. Joshua's generals would look at each other as if to say, "What shall we do now?" God knows human nature, therefore at this emergency He steps in with the words, "Be not afraid because of them, for to-morrow about this time will I deliver them up all slain before Israel." God is always well timed in His announcements. When we seek with all our hearts to do His will we shall never lack encouragement, and the greater the enemy, the harder the task, the more emphatic will that encouragement be. And the encouragement God gave was very definite. He did not speak in a general way. He fixed the day, the hour, and the extent of the victory. Whatever our difficulties may be, if we only search God's Word we will find definite encouragement, that which exactly meets our circumstances. The encouragement was also emphatic. We lose somewhat, in our translation, the emphasis of the original. The "I" is most emphatic. The army before Joshua may be as the sand of the sea for multitude, but what are the hosts of Jabin to the hosts of Jehovah? And the man who has on his side Jehovah of hosts can also count on the hosts of Jehovah. Therefore Joshua, even in the sight of such a foe, has no cause for fear. Does not God deal in the very same way with us? With what emphasis does He point to Himself as the glorious source of light and love and life, so that our hearts may be encouraged to put all their trust in Him, to the casting out of every fear. And the encouragement was also suggestive. God's words bring to remembrance other scenes and other victories. Joshua was not the only one whom God had helped in similar emergencies. All the difficulties that may come upon us may be new to us, but not one of them is new to God. He has brought His people triumphantly through the same or worse before, and He can do so again. II. This Divine encouragement was coupled with a DIVINE COMMAND. The chief object of Israel's fear would naturally be the horses and chariots which were Jabin's pride and confidence; and it is to them that the command has special reference. God ordered His servants not to seize them and turn them against the enemy, but to destroy them utterly. This command is given for the express purpose of removing a temptation to carnal confidence. Jehovah wishes His people to look to Him alone for victory. This is to be their constant attitude, the

holy habit of their souls. The bearing of this command on us is plain, and the lesson is much needed in our day. We are to carry on God's work in God's way. There are many of the weapons and devices of the world which ought not to be pressed into the service of the Church. To handle the iron chariots and the prancing horses of human philosophy against the hosts of unbelief, at the same time retaining our confidence in God as the Giver of every victory, and the consciousness that not a single soul can be savingly convinced except by His might—this is an attainment which the history of the Church from the beginning has proved a practical impossibility. Our one work in the prosecution of the campaign of salvation is to preach "Christ and Him crucified," though fully conscious of the fact that to some it is foolishness, not worth a row of pins; and to others a stumbling-block, utterly repugnant. There is, and has always been, a fatal tendency to use the world's weapons in the Church's work; to worship intellect, learning, genius, scholarship, eloquence; to look on these things as the treasury and armoury of the Church; to depend on what is outward and human, instead of what is spiritual; to depend on that which appeals to the eye, the ear, the intellect, the emotions, rather than on the living God and His glorious gospel. They are the mightiest champions who, like the Master, do all the fighting "not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit, and with power." Thus encouraged and commanded, Joshua brought his army into close proximity to the foe. He rested during that night, and when the grey dawn was lighting up the rushy marshes round the waters of Merom, he burst like a thunderbolt upon Jabin's camp. The victory could not have been more complete; and it was speedily followed up, as in the south, by the subjugation of all the leading cities in the northern portion of Canaan; the city of Hazor, Jabin's capital, being destroyed with fire. As we think on this crowning victory we remember the words, "An horse is a vain thing for safety, neither shall he deliver any by his great strength." Jabin found this out in that dire encounter. So will it be with all who harden themselves against the gospel of Christ. The more stout in heart they are to resist, the more terrible will be their overthrow. And if Jabin's overthrow reminds us of these things, this last great victory of Joshua also places very emphatically before us the conditions of success in the work of the Lord. They are few and simple, and easy to be understood. They comprise wise purpose, believing courage, sleepless energy, scrupulous obedience, hard blows. As a young student said to a friend when they were speaking of the work to which they had devoted themselves, "Our great work in preaching to people is not to dish up dainty ideas, but to pound them with the truth." Let us only listen to God's encouragement, obey God's command, march with unfeigned faith, and strike with all our might, and victory is sure. (*A. B. Mackay.*)

Types of Christian warfare:—1. The enemies of Christ are very many in number. 2. Not only are the enemies of Christ very numerous, but they are perfectly united. There is a common consent amongst them. They hate the good. They are unanimous, and their unanimity is power. 3. The forces of evil are many, united, and desperate. They have made up their minds to work rack and ruin. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

All the spoil of these cities, and the cattle, the children of Israel took for a prey unto themselves.—*Sharing the spoil*:—These at the end would amply make up for the toils and sufferings of conflict, and for all the privations and prohibitions they had been laid under. This is that which should engage the Christian's hopes, and on which his whole heart should be set, the end of warfare, when He who poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with transgressors, will, in assigning the fruits of His eternal conquests, divide the spoil with the strong, and His portion with the great. Unsearchable the riches, and invaluable the spoils, to be shared in the heavenly world: treasures of everlasting bliss and glory that await every holy warrior. These are appropriate only to the elevation of perfect being and blessedness; and then to be enjoyed, when the conflicts of time end in the triumphs of eternity. Nothing will be found marked with a prohibition, nor anything less be obtained, than an unwithering crown of life. This will compensate for all the sufferings that can now be endured, and for all the sacrifices that may ever be made, the hope of which, as realised in the mind, yields no small support. (*W. Seaton.*)

Ver. 15. **He left nothing undone of all that the Lord commanded Moses.**—*Things undone*:—"This year omissions have distressed me more than anything." So speaks Andrew A. Bonar, concluding one of the years of his life. How many of us

are similarly distressed! I. THE THINGS UNDONE ARE MANY. We have not left undone a duty here or there merely, but we have the painful consciousness of having missed so much that more seems undone than done. Darwin's biographer relates that the great scientist "never wasted a few spare minutes from thinking that it was not worth while to set to work." His golden rule was "taking care of the minutes." And so he became rich and accurate in knowledge. How much more might we have done in the home! We deal negligently with those about us until change or death takes them away! How much more might we have done in the world! We have loitered in the sheepfold to hear the bleating of the sheep, when we ought to have been in the high places of the field. How much more might we have given and taught and toiled in the Church of God! We are always evading manifest obligations, which are also precious privileges. With what fiery energy the bird, the bee, the butterfly, carry out the special commission with which they are entrusted! In nature everything seems to be done that can be done with the granted measure of time, space, material, and energy. But we are conscious of a very different and far less satisfactory state of things in the human sphere. Here inertia, laziness, slipperiness, procrastination, prevail. There are great gaps in our work. II. THE THINGS UNDONE ARE OFTEN THE THINGS OF THE GREATEST CONSEQUENCE. Emerson speaks of "the science of omitting." A very necessary and much-neglected science. "The artist," says Schiller, "may be known rather by what he omits." The master of literary style is best recognised by his tact of omission. The orator declares his genius as much by what he leaves out as by what he puts into his discourses. And in life the science of omission must have a large place. Life on its moral side, in its highest sense, becomes complete and successful by exclusion: if we are to make anything of it, we must reject much. When, however, an artist understands the science of omission, he leaves out the trivial, the vulgar, the irrelevant. Pater, speaking of Watteau, the French artist, says, "Sketching the scene to the life, but with a kind of grace, a marvellous tact of omission in dealing with the vulgar reality seen from one's own window." Yes, leaving out the vulgar features and commonplace detail. But the defect in our moral life is that in our science of omission we too often leave out the primary, the highest, the essential. The trivial, the fugitive, the inferior, the accidental, are given a place in our life, whilst the large, the noble, the precious, and the supreme are excluded. It is thus with us in questions of character. The weightier matters are more difficult, and we evade them. It is thus with matters of duty. We shirk the calls demanding courage, diligence, sacrifice, and content ourselves by doing abundantly the things which are more immediately connected with our pride, our interest, or our pleasure. Here we are often condemned. Great principles are left out of our character, because they are difficult to acquire and maintain; great duties are ignored, because they mean heroism and suffering; great opportunities are forfeited, because they demand promptitude and resolution; great works are declined, because they involve consecration and sacrifice. III. THE THINGS UNDONE ARE THINGS FOR WHICH WE MUST BE HELD RESPONSIBLE. We are often deeply concerned, as, indeed, we ought to be, with the things we have done amiss; but we are less troubled by the things left undone. Yet the negative side is as really sin as is the positive side. In these modern days it is rather fashionable for men of a certain type to stand quite aside from an active career. They are deeply impressed by the seriousness of life, by its difficulties, its mysteries; they decline, as far as may be, its relationships, its obligations, its trials, its honours, its sorrows. They will tell you that they have no gifts, no calling, no opportunity. But, however disguised, these lives are slothful and guilty. But most of us have somewhat of this slothful temper. True, we gloss with mild names this skirking of duty. We call it expediency, standing over, modesty, deliberation, forgetfulness, oversight; but it ought to be called sloth, hypocrisy, cowardice, sin. How much undone for God, for man, for our own perfecting! And as for the future, let us put into life more purpose, passion, and will. Let us be more definite, prompt, unflinching. Let us be at once more enthusiastic and more methodical. (*W. L. Watkinson.*)

It was of the Lord to harden their hearts.—*Resisted conviction*:—We must not suppose, of course, that God stepped in to produce, in the case of these Canaanites, a result which would not have accrued to them by the working out of the natural laws which He had instituted. God loved them as He loves the world. They were included in the propitiation of Christ. They might have been saved, as Rahab was. And when it is said that God hardened their hearts, we must understand that their hearts became hardened by sinning against their light, in accordance

with that great principle which God has established, that if a man resists his convictions of right he becomes more inveterate in his sinful ways. God is thus said to do what is done by the working out of the laws of that moral universe which He has constituted. It is clear that the Canaanites knew that God was with Israel. Rahab said (chap. ii. 10, 11). And the Gibeonites (chap. ix. 10). There is no doubt, then, that throughout the land there had gone forth the fame of God; and when the kings flung their hosts in battle against Israel it was as it has always been (Psa. ii. 2). (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Hardening the heart*:—I remember one day, in our natural history class, the professor explained to us how sponges became flints. He had all his specimens arranged along his table. He took the soft sponge, elastic and flaccid, that could bend any way—beautifully soft and fine. Then he took the next one; it was not so flexible: and he went on, each one only a little more flinty than the former, till he had the flint. That had been a sponge; though now its heart was so hard that you could strike fire from it with a steel. The sponge will become flint. There are little silicious particles that gather in the soft sponge; and by and by the silex is deposited in the interstices of the sponge; and on it goes till the silica has the victory, and the sponge becomes flint. A wonderful sermon from science. I have had companions like that—young men with hearts, oh, so soft! at their first revival. Impressions went home to them; they had tears and anxiety; yet, as years have passed, the hardness of heart has increased, as with one whom I met recently, who, since then, has bolted to America with a heart of flint instead of a soft heart. As the days went by, hardness increased; the silicious particles of rejection of Christ multiplied in number, till the man became a reprobate. Perhaps you are in that position. As I am preaching from the presence of God it has no effect. You are hearing it, but it is going in at the one ear and out at the other. See to it that the judicial hardening of your heart does not overtake you, and you learn by experience the despair of a lost soul. (*J. Robertson.*) **So Joshua took the whole land.**—*The people for whom the Lord fights*:—I. THE MAGNITUDE OF THEIR DIFFICULTIES SHOULD BE REGARDED AS ONLY THE MEASURE OF THEIR VICTORIES. "Joshua took the whole land." II. THEIR MOST SIGNAL VICTORIES ARE EVER INCOMPLETE. The whole land, yet not the whole (chap. viii. 1). III. THE TRIUMPHS WHICH THEY DO WIN ARE EVER THE FRUIT OF GOD'S PROMISES. "According to all that the Lord said unto Moses." This clause serves also to limit and explain the former. God had specially told Moses that the whole land should not be conquered too suddenly (Exod. xxiii. 29, 30). IV. THE INHERITANCE THUS GIVEN BY GOD SHOULD BE THE INHERITANCE OF ALL GOD'S PEOPLE. "Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel according to their divisions by their tribes." V. THE REST WHICH THEY OBTAIN HERE FAINTLY FORESHADOWS THE PERFECT REST HEREAFTER. "And the land rested from war." 1. Rest after severe strife. 2. Rest only through faith and obedience. 3. Rest, but rest which still requires that they watch and pray. 4. Rest, which though but an imperfect pattern, should stand for a sure prophecy of the rest which is perfect. If we really enter into the rest of faith, it will be by that holy Spirit of promise, "which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession." (*F. G. Marchant.*)

Ver. 23. **The land rested from war.**—*The fight from which they rested*:—Though the records of this war are short, we know that "Joshua made war a long time with all these kings." Only the most striking and salient features are recorded, and these are such as are well fitted for correction and instruction. The campaign in all probability lasted for six years. God, had He so chosen, could have brought all the Canaanites together and crushed them at one blow. He did not do so, and He gives us the reason why He did not. So far as His people were concerned it was for their spiritual training. Had He wrought such a wonder, they might have magnificently celebrated His praises as at the Red Sea, but as easily forgotten His mercies as at Marah. Jehovah sought to teach them and us by the continuance of this conflict, that His heritage is our portion only through faith in Him and faithfulness to His word. Yet there is an opposite error that must be guarded against. If we are not to expect one great and decisive victory, much less are we to expect a series of disastrous defeats. If too great a triumph might have led to presumption on the part of Israel, too great a trial might have induced despair. Accordingly, God neither gave the one nor did He permit the other, but always tempered both to the necessities of His people. Is not this a true picture of spiritual experience, full of instruction and encouragement? How often does the

young convert feel himself walking in a land of miracle? "Old things have passed away, all things have become new." The chains of iron and the fetters of steel fall from his limbs. The bars of brass are broken, and he quits the prison-house of Satan and walks abroad in abounding liberty and glorious triumph. Sometimes, indeed, in the buoyancy of his soul, he indulges in strange talk, shakes his head with precocious wisdom, and assumes unconscious airs of superiority in the presence of such as do not share his happy experience. But by and by he encounters some gross and humiliating defeat like that which befel Israel at Ai. He is humbled in the dust. With chastened spirit he begins to join trembling with his mirth, and he finds out, more and more every day, the need of constant trust and unquestioning obedience. He wakes up to the fact that in this fight of faith, as in that, the conditions of success are trustful courage, wise purpose, sleepless energy, scrupulous obedience, and hard blows. It will be interesting to notice the last foes encountered in this fight. We read in the immediately preceding verses: "At that time came Joshua, and cut off the Anakims." These Anakim were the first to fill the hearts of the Israelites with fear, and they were the last to be faced. Compared with them the Israelites felt themselves grasshoppers, and it was well that their giant strength was not braved at the beginning of the campaign, but reserved to its close. Israel did not face these giants till it had been trained in the war of the Lord; till it knew how invincible was the man who puts his trust in Jehovah; till it knew from its own experience how one could chase a thousand—till, in short, it was able to measure the strength of the Anakim not against its own, but against the omnipotence of Jehovah. The opposition, which was once deemed invincible, now shrinks into insignificance. How often is it thus in the experience of God's people. I have sometimes asked young converts why they had been so long in coming forward to confess Christ. And their reply has often been, "I saw what was required and expected of a Christian. I felt the many and great difficulties that lay in the way of confessing Christ. I knew something of the temptations and troubles that would come upon me if I became a Christian, and as I looked at these things I felt afraid, and shrank back conscious of my own weakness." Exactly! Before these difficulties, that would come upon you by confessing Christ, you feel as grasshoppers. Does that express your present position? You are like Israel at Kadesh-Barnea. You are standing on the very borders of the land, with all its beauty spread before you. Yea, you also are spying it out. You are considering the promises and blessings of Christ for time and eternity. You cannot but confess that it is a goodly heritage, a pleasant land flowing with milk and honey. Even though you have not entered the good land, you know that you are refreshed by its blessed fruits. Then why not enter in? It is free for you. No walls rise up between you and it to shut you out. No deep river rolls to prevent your entrance. Ah! you are afraid. There are giants there, and strong cities walled to the sky. If I confess Christ I shall have mighty temptations and troubles to face and overcome. Are such your difficulties? Well, I do not say you are strong. I do not say that there are no Anakim in the land. But I do say that you utterly misunderstand the meaning of the situation. The instant you go forward you enlist on your side the strength of Jehovah, and there is no sin, no temptation, no trouble, however gigantic, over which He cannot cause you to triumph. But there are lessons here for the Christian veteran as well as for the Christian recruit. He has left Moses behind, as a leader who can give no rest, he has put himself under the flag of Joshua, he has entered into the inheritance and fought the good fight of faith, with encouraging measure of success. Yet still there remain some temptations, some sins, some sorrows, some bereavements, which look very dreadful. They are like gigantic Anakim, before which you quail. Do not measure your might with theirs. Pit them against the omnipotence of your Father God. Any temptation, any sin, any trial, is too much for us in our own strength; but strengthened with His might the meanest can face and overcome the greatest of them all. Notice, again, that the fighting does not grow less severe as we go onwards. The Anakim were left to the last. So often the greatest burdens, sharpest trials, severest afflictions, fiercest temptations, come at the end. No man can ever rest here in fancied security. (*A. B. Mackay.*) *The rest for which they fought:*—The rest for which Israel fought had been promised more than four hundred years before (Gen. xii. 1–3, 6, 7, &c.). This promise, so old, so solemn, so wide, so definite, so clear, and so often repeated, was the formative and governing principle in the lives of all the patriarchs. This it was that made them Faith's Pilgrim Fathers. They believed these promises, their hearts embraced

them, and they confessed that they were pilgrims and strangers in the earth. But the promise was sure, though held long in abeyance for wise and loving purposes. The vision may tarry, but come it must; because God's gifts and calling are without repentance, unconditioned by aught in the creature; and because God's power and wisdom are without limit. He is the God of truth and of infinite resources. Through strange scenes, hard discipline, and varying experiences the seed of Abraham may pass, but all the time God is leading them to His promised rest. What a lesson in patience have we here! What encouragement to wait for the end of the Lord! Surely, as we consider them thus at the end of their toils and in the enjoyment of that great promise, we may exclaim, "Happy is the people whose God is the Lord." Is there anything as good in store for us? There is better. God's basket of bounty is not empty. God's act gave this promise first of all. After He created all things He rested from His works. He had gone out of Himself to work; He returned to Himself to rest. As certainly as the old creation, through ages of convulsion and astounding changes, attained its crown and climax in God's rest, so surely the new creation, by whatever mysteries and conflicts its development is characterised, shall usher in the glorious Sabbath of redemption. As surely as Joshua gave rest to those who followed him, so surely does Jesus give rest to all who put their trust in Him. The innumerable company of the redeemed have found in this promise a power sufficient to govern all their lives, a solace for every woe. But if the rest for which Israel fought was a rest long promised, it was also a rest which for a time was forfeited. "They could not enter in because of unbelief. Thou standest by faith. Therefore be not high-minded, but fear." Let us fear with that fear which has strong confidence, with which we work out our salvation, which mingles with holy mirth, which lasts through all the time of our sojourn here, and which is our safety. "Blessed is the man that feareth alway." Further, the rest for which Israel fought was imperfect. It was only a comparative rest. The land as a whole was taken. It was so far in their hands that they could with safety partition it among the several tribes, allowing each to perfect the work of conquest within his allotted territory. The Canaanites were unable to put an army in the field. Their united power was for the time utterly broken. Yet still they had cities here and there in their possession. They were to remain for a time, to prevent the land from lapsing into an irreclaimable waste, to exercise the people in war, and to be a test of Israel's faithfulness. We have therefore here a master-sketch of Christian experience. The believer enters into life by a miracle of grace and power. He is buried with Christ by baptism into His death. He is raised with Him and seated with Him in heavenly places. He finds his Gilgal at Golgotha, where the reproach of sin is rolled away, and he receives nourishment for his soul. Here, also, he learns the mystery of the Divine leadership of Him who has said, "Lo, I am with you alway." He takes Him as Prophet, Priest, and King. Then he learns the might of faith in casting down the walls which human pride and strength and skill have reared. He is also taught, it may be by humiliating defeat, the weakness of unbelief and disobedience, as was Israel at Ai. He is convinced that if he is not to make shipwreck he must hold fast "faith and a good conscience." Then with bitter sorrow he learns the value of self-judgment and confession of sin. The dark and dreadful valley of Achor becomes the only door of hope. Then with deeper intelligence he repeats with restored soul the Amen of allegiance, deliberately takes the law of God for his guide, and depends on the Cross for power of communion. He camps at Ebal and Gerizim, in the very centre of the blessed inheritance, surrounded by its fairest scenes, when his heart knows the meaning of these words, "If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." Then, from new consecration, rejoicing in Christ Jesus, and having no confidence in the flesh, he passes on to higher acts of faith and to nobler victories. Things in heaven as well as things on earth reveal faith's power. He can put his foot on the neck of tyrant sins, and laugh to scorn the horses and chariots of human might. Sometimes there are periods of desperate fighting, in which every fibre is strained to its utmost tension. Sometimes there are periods of comparative repose, a welcome lull, when the land rests from war. And in these happy days all the work may seem done, and perfect victory gained. Old and tough sins are conquered. Those that remain hide their diminished heads. Still they lurk in the dark recesses of the heart, ready to spring out and pounce upon us if for a moment we are off our guard. Therefore there is constant need of watchfulness. Lastly, the rest for

which Israel fought was prospective. From the very fact of its imperfections it pointed forward to a better. (*Ibid.*) *Rest from war:*—Interesting period! What so much the anticipation of the heart in conflict? As long as the land remained unsubdued rest could not be enjoyed. Besides, had there been nothing else to annoy peace and disturb the inheritance of the Church, whose heart could have rested in his lot, and been free from distress, amidst the judgments of heaven upon guilty idolaters, and upon whom Divine authority made it an imperious necessity in Israel to execute a sentence of extermination? Sweet to the expectation and welcome of hope, a period when, in the perfect and undisturbed rest of heaven, war will cease for ever, and sighs of woe be eternally removed. The peace of heaven will be lasting as sweet. There no Canaanites will be left to dispute their right, or remnants of broken powers ever rise to assert, and attempt to restore their long forfeited claim. That land shall have rest from war, as long as the destroyer of sin and conqueror of death shall live. Joyous prospect! Soon the armour of light will be exchanged for robes of incorruptible glory, and the helmet of salvation for the conqueror's crown. As under the dominion of the Prince of peace, and themselves the subjects of its reigning influence, Christians will rest from war; as commanded, they will cease from anger and forsake strife. Nor will they ever embroil themselves in the contentions of others, unless as peace-speakers and peace-makers. (*W. Seaton.*)

CHAPTER XII.

VERS. 1–24. These are the kings of the land, which the children of Israel smote.—*The goodness and severity of God:*—This chapter is a short summary of the work that has been done. In this *résumé* of the conquest Moses is not forgotten. He is named as well as Joshua. The Holy Ghost delights to point out how God causes many instruments to work out His designs, and thus takes all praise from man. Thus the chapter is a miniature, suggesting all the victories that Israel won, and all the defeats which overwhelmed the Canaanites. Accordingly it is valuable as a demonstration that both the promises and the threatenings of God will be fulfilled to the letter. Here as in a glass we see on the one hand the course and the end of those who follow God, and on the other the course and the end of those who resist. Or, we have pointed out to us the narrow way that leads to life, and the broad road that leads to destruction. May we ponder these things and learn the way wherein we should walk. I. THE DIFFERENT ROADS. That of Israel was the path of obedience. Everything was done by Divine command. But it was not always easy work for Israel to obey. The commands of God not only led along a narrow way, but often brought them up to a strait gate. They had just to go right on, according to the command of God. Obedience was their watchword. To stop and parley was to be lost. Patient endurance characterised them all through. When an old general was asked why he picked out the old veterans for a forced march he replied, "Because they have the most staying power." For hard work of any kind this is what tells in the long run; and from the first encounter with Sihon and Og to the last wrestle with the Anakim Israel exhibited this quality both in things physical and things spiritual. Obedience was the path: patient endurance was the characteristic of those who walked therein. On the part of the Canaanites their course was marked by rebellion. They said, "Who is Lord over us?" Thus they hardened themselves against God's will, and fought it out to the bitter end, learning no lesson and yielding no submission. These two paths of obedience and rebellion have not ceased to be trodden. Neither of them is grass-grown. Thank God there are many who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality. If there must be patient continuance on the part of those who walk the narrow way, there must be constant contention on the part of those who hurry down the broad road. There must be the resistance of the Holy Ghost, of the warnings of conscience, of the light of truth. There must be at times the fear of death and judgment and eternity. II. THE DIFFERENT OBJECTS placed before each. That placed before Israel was something very definite and tangible, viz., the sure promise of Jehovah. To them that promise was the title-deed of the Holy Land;

therefore all through this war they had in their eye a Divine inheritance, and all the glory and honour which this implied. Can we find any similar incitement on the part of the Canaanites? Nay. Theirs was a hopeless struggle. They were without God and therefore without hope. They obeyed unrighteousness, and were therefore filled with unrest. So is it now. They who walk in the obedience of faith have a glorious object before their eyes to stimulate and encourage them. They seek for glory and honour and immortality. And they have good hope through grace of obtaining it. Yea, they have God's faithful promise, and therefore glorious assurance of the result. But where is the hope of the rebellious? It is but a vague, unsatisfying dream. At the very best they have no certainty of a happy issue. When they pass hence it is "A leap in the dark." What a miserable plight is this! Notwithstanding their vast coalitions, their imposing armies, their formidable weapons, their notable leaders, they go forward with fear. The Sihon and Og of materialism, the Adoni-zedek of sacerdotalism, the Jabin of false philosophy, can inspire no true and blessed hope in the hearts of their faltering followers. III. THE DIFFERENT ENDS. We see the Israelites marching on from victory to victory; entering into Canaan, enjoying the smile of God, and reaping the fruit of their labours. We see the Canaanites swept with the besom of destruction, and all that is left of their mightiest kings is the chronicle of their tombstones as given here. The ends are different because the beginnings are different. Of Israel it might be said, "These all fought in faith." Of the Canaanites it might be said, "These all died in unbelief." Paul has laid plainly before us in the Epistle to the Romans these two ends, as we must know them. On the one hand he places eternal life, glory, honour, peace. On the other he places indignation, wrath, tribulation, anguish. One or other of these is the terminus to which every life is hastening. And he also plainly tells us that without faith it is impossible to walk in the good way or to attain the glorious end. Remember then God's solemn record of the dead. He marks His own as precious jewels, to be worn in His crown in the day of glory, but He counts His enemies but worthless ashes to be trodden under foot. In the Divine record of the dead there are no omissions, no oversights, and no lies. He counts His enemies and He counts His friends. How will He count you? (*A. B. Mackay.*)

CHAPTER XIII.

VERS. 1–33.—**Thou art old and stricken in years.**—*Joshua's old age*:—"The Lord said unto Joshua, Thou art old and stricken in years." To many men and women this would not be a welcome announcement. They do not like to think that they are old. They do not like to think that the bright, joyous, playful part of life is over, and that they are arrived at the sombre years when they must say, "There is no pleasure in them." Then, again, there are some who really find it hard to believe that they are old. Life has flown past so swiftly that before they thought it was well begun it has gone. But however much men may like to be young, and however much some may retain in old age of the feeling of youth, it is certain that the period of strength has its limit, and the period of life also. To Joshua the announcement that he was old and stricken in years does not appear to have brought any painful or regretful feeling. Perhaps he had aged somewhat suddenly; his energies may have failed consciously and rapidly, after his long course of active and anxious military service. He may have been glad to hear God utter the word; he may have been feeling it himself, and wondering how he should be able to go through the campaigns yet necessary to put the children of Israel in full possession of the land. So Joshua finds that he is now to be relieved by his considerate Master of laborious and anxious service. Not of all service, but of exhausting service, unsuited to his advancing years. Joshua had been a right faithful servant; few men have ever done their work so well. He has led a most useful and loyal life, which there is some satisfaction in looking back on. No doubt he is well aware of unnumbered failings: "Who can understand his errors?" But he has the rare satisfaction—oh! who would not wish to share it?—of looking back on a well-spent life, habitually and earnestly regulated

amid many infirmities by regard to the will of God. Yet Joshua was not to complete that work to which he had contributed so much: "there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed." At one time, no doubt, he thought otherwise, and he desired otherwise. When the tide of victory was setting in for him so steadily, and region after region of the land was falling into his hands, it was natural to expect that before he ended he would sweep all the enemies of Israel before him, and open every door for them throughout the land, even to its utmost borders. Why not make hay when the sun shone? When God had found so apt an instrument for His great design, why did He not employ him to the end? If the natural term of Joshua's strength had come, why did not that God who had supernaturally lengthened out the day for completing the victory of Bethhoron lengthen out Joshua's day, that the whole land of Canaan might be secured? Here comes in a great mystery of Providence. Instead of lengthening out the period of Joshua's strength, God seems to have cut it short. We can easily understand the lesson for Joshua himself. Joshua must be made to feel—perhaps he needs this—that this enterprise is not his, but God's. And God is not limited to one instrument, or to one age, or to one plan. Never does Providence appear to us so strange as when a noble worker is cut down in the very midst of his work. A young missionary has just shown his splendid capacity for service, when fever strikes him low, and in a few days all that remains of him is rotting in the ground. "What can God mean?" we sometimes ask impatiently. "Does He not know the rare value and the extreme scarcity of such men, that He sets them up apparently just to throw them down?" But "God reigneth, let the people tremble." All that bears on the Christian good of the world is in God's plan, and it is very dear to God, and "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." But He is not limited to single agents. (*W. G. Blaikie, D.D.*) *God takes note of our failing strength*:—He says, concerning this man and that, Grey hairs are here and there upon him, and he knoweth it not. About some supposedly strong men, He says, They are wearing out; they are old at forty; at fifty they will be patriarchal, so far as the exhaustion of strength is concerned; they will die young in years, but old in service. God's work does take much out of a man, if the man is faithful. A man may pray himself into a withered old age in one night: in one little day a man may add years to his labour. We can work off-handedly: the work need not take much out of us; but if we think about it, ponder it, execute it with both hands —if it is the one thought of the soul, who can tell how soon the strongest man may be run out, and the youngest become a white-haired patriarch? But blessed is it to be worked out in this service. A quaint minister of the last century said, "It is better to rub out than to rust out." How many are content to "rust out"! They know nothing about friction, sacrifice, self-slaughter, martyrdom. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) **There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed.**—*Unconquered territory*:—I. REVEALED TRUTH YET TO BE LEARNED. We have not yet secured all the sacred knowledge which God has made possible, and which it would be profitable for us to acquire. Here is this book set out before us, the great region of revealed religion. May we not say that "there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed"? Who among us is familiar with all its histories, is acquainted with all its facts, knows all its truths, has seen all its beauties, or learned all its lessons? Some of you have been through the pass of Llanberis—perhaps twenty times. Did you ever see it twice alike? Always the same thing; and yet a different appearance, because seen under different circumstances. If you were to go through it twenty times twenty times, it would never appear twice alike. The light would be falling on it at different angles, and thus make a difference. On a cloudy day you would see something you did not see on a bright day, and on a rainy day you would see something you did not see on a fine day. It is thus with this book. You say that you read the Bible through last year, and you ask, "What is to be gained by reading it through again this year?" Have you the same hopes? the same joys? the same sorrows? the same aspirations? the same motives? and the same experiences? I care not how often you have read it, you have never read it as you feel now, with your present experience and in your present circumstances. II. A HOLY CHARACTER TO BE ACQUIRED. There remaineth much of that to be possessed. Men in ancient times had not a Divine standard to measure themselves by, or a Divine pattern to contrast themselves with, and learn how deficient they were and full of blemishes. We have had a perfect pattern set before us. In the life of our Lord Jesus Christ we have the map of the good land; see it in its length and

breadth, and realise how true it is that there are glorious portions of it over which our flag has not floated, provinces which we have not made our own. III. CHRISTIAN USEFULNESS. I am not going to slander the Christian Church, and tell you that former times were better than these. There is nothing gained by telling lies for God. If you want to quicken God's people you must not talk as if the Church were more sleepy now than it ever was before. I do not believe it. As I read ecclesiastical history, I cannot find many periods when the Church, as a whole, was more vigorous and devoted than now. Let us not ignore what God has done for us, and enabled us to do. "Not unto us, but unto Him be the praise and glory." But when we take into account all that has been done and all that has been attempted against the world's ignorance, vice, and ungodliness, may we not still say, "There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed"? It is not the season for slothfulness, selfishness, or prayerlessness; the call is urgent and great. "There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed." Why did God keep His people to that struggle? He gave the people the land, and then they had to fight for it. They crossed the Jordan with the best title-deeds man ever possessed; they came from heaven, they were given by Him to whom all the earth belongs. The title-deed of the people said, "The land is yours"; and after God had given it to them they had to buckle on the sword, sharpen the spear, and go and win every acre of it. This is God's way—He gives it to you, and yet He says, "Get it; work it out with fear and trembling." Why does He treat us so? I cannot tell; but this I know, that if we cease to work the powers of evil never will. (*Charles Vince.*) *The Christian's work*:—Canaan, though commonly used as a type of heaven, is, in some of its aspects, a type rather of a state of grace than of a state of glory. And taking this view of it, I remark that—I. CANAAN, AS THE ISRAELITES FOUND IT, REPRESENTS THE STATE OF MAN'S HEART WHEN THE GRACE OF GOD ENTERS IT. Think of a soul like thine, made at first in the image of God; a being such as thou art, once occupying a rank in creation next to and but a little lower than that of angels; a heart like thine which, though blighted by sin, still retains some traces of departed glory, alienated from the true God, held captive of the devil, ruled by unholy passions, full of corruptions as difficult to root out as were these sons of Anak who, in Goliath and his giant race, disturbed the peace of Israel and defied the armies of the living God many long years after the land was, in a sense, both conquered and possessed. The Hebrews did not enter Canaan to find an empty land, which they had nothing to do but to occupy; nor does Jesus, when He enters our heart by His Spirit and saving grace. It is in possession of His enemies. They are there to dispute His rights, and resist His entrance—sons of Anak, indeed; more formidable still; for giant sins are less easily conquered than giant men. II. THE BLESSINGS OF THE KINGDOM OF GRACE, LIKE THOSE OF CANAAN, HAVE TO BE FOUGHT FOR. Bring out every sin before the Lord, and let it be condemned to death; pass the sword of the Spirit through and through it, till it has breathed out its cursed life, and has no more dominion over you. As the apostle says, "Let him that nameth the name of Christ depart from all iniquity." Beware how you leave innate corruption and old sinful habits to draw down on you the anger of a holy God and the afflictions threatened on Israel (Num. xxxiii. 55). III. THE MOST ADVANCED CHRISTIAN HAS MUCH TO DO IN THE WAY OF SANCTIFICATION. How truly may it be said to the most experienced, aged, honoured Christian, as the Lord said to Joshua, "Thou art old and well stricken in years, and yet there is much land to be possessed. Sin still has more or less power over you, and it should have none; your corruptions are wounded, dying of mortal wounds, but they are not yet dead; your affections are set on heaven, yet how much are they still entangled with earthly things; your heart, like the needle of a sailor's compass to its pole, points to Christ, but how easily is it disturbed, how tremblingly and unsteadily does it often point to Him; your spirit has wings, but how short are its flights, and how often, like a half-fledged eaglet, has it to seek the nest, and come back to rest on the Rock of Ages; your soul is a garden in which, when north and south winds blow to call out its spices, Christ delights to walk, but with many a beautiful flower, how many vile weeds are there—ready to spring up, and ill to keep down; requiring constant care and watching." Indeed, so many impurities and imperfections cleave to the best of us, that it seems to me a change must take place at death only second to what took place at conversion. How that is done is a mystery which we cannot fathom; but it would seem as if grace, like that species of cereus which opens its gorgeous flower only at midnight burst out into fullest beauty amid the darkness of a dying hour. (*T. Guthrie, D.D.*) *The uncompleted work*:—

There is much land to be possessed in—I. THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD. Columbus was not content to pick up a few shells on the beach of the new world—he explored the continent; alas! we are too soon satisfied with coasting for a little on that great continent of the Divine nature. II. THE STUDY OF THE BIBLE. Christians are too prone to keep to the beaten tracks; they do not make excursions into less familiar paths; some pages well thumbed, others clean and uncut. III. CHRISTIAN CHARACTER. Canaan was occupied by seven nations of ugly names; but our hearts and lives are cursed by still uglier things. We must not be content until all these are brought under obedience to Christ. IV. THE HEATHEN WORLD. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *On progress in religion*:—Christians, God has assigned you a glorious portion. Opening before you the discoveries of revelation, He said, "Make all this your own; advance; leave nothing unpossessed." At first you were filled with spiritual ardour, "laying aside every weight," &c. But, alas! your love has waxen cold. I. Yes, Christians, THERE REMAINETH YET VERY MUCH LAND TO BE POSSESSED—many cities and strongholds, many fine plains, and "springs of water," many beautiful valleys, and very "fruitful hills"—or, to speak less in figure, much of your religion is unattained, unoccupied, unenjoyed; you are far from its boundaries. Very little of it indeed do some of you possess; you command only a small, inconsiderable corner, scarcely affording you a subsistence. 1. Consider your knowledge. After so many years of hearing, what additions have you made to your stores? Are you filled with holy prudence to ponder "the path of your feet," to "look well to your goings," and to discern snares where there is no appearance of danger? Do you "walk circumspectly; not as fools, but as wise"? 2. Observe your holiness. For the knowledge of persons may surpass their experience; and a growth in gifts is very distinguishable from a growth in grace. Review, then, your sanctification; and suffer me to ask, Have you no remaining corruptions to subdue? Is your obedience universal, unvarying, cheerful? Have you fully imbibed the tempers of your religion? Are there no deficiencies perceivable in every grace, in every duty? 3. Think of your privileges. It is the privilege of Christians to be "careful for nothing." It is the privilege of Christians to "enter into rest." It is the privilege of Christians to "have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." It is the privilege of Christians to "count it all joy when they fall into divers temptations; and to glory in tribulation also." And all this has been exemplified. Men have "received the gospel in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: they have taken pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake"; they have "taken joyfully the spoiling of their goods"; they have approached the flames with rapture; they have loved and longed for "His appearing"—but where are you? Always in darkness and alarms, &c. Do you belong to the same company? II. Whence is this? Why will you suffer all this remaining religion to be unpossessed? How shall I awaken you from your negligence, and convince you of the PROPRIETY AND NECESSITY OF MAKING FRESH AND CONTINUAL ADVANCES? 1. I place before you the commands of God. You are forbidden to draw back; you are forbidden to be stationary. Something more is necessary than languid, partial, occasional, temporary progression. You are required to be "steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord"; to "add to your faith, virtue," &c. 2. I surround you with all the images employed by the sacred writers when they would describe the nature of a religious life. For which of them does not imply progress, and remind us of the importance of undiminished ardour and increasing exertion? Light. Growing grain. Mustard seed. Leaven. 3. I call forth examples in your presence; they teach you the same truth. Who said, "I beseech thee, show me Thy glory"? A man who had "seen God face to face." Who prayed, "Teach me Thy statutes: open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law"? A man who had "more understanding than all his teachers," a man who "understood more than the ancients." 4. I hold up to view the advantages of progressive religion. (1) A Christian should be concerned for the honour of God. He is under infinite obligations to "show forth the praises of Him, who hath called us," &c.; but "herein is" our "Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit." (2) A Christian should be concerned for the welfare of his fellow-creatures. He should be a blessing to his family, to his country. (3) A Christian should be concerned for his own prosperity. And has he to learn wherein it consists? Need he be told that adding grace to grace is adding "strength to strength," dignity to dignity, beauty to beauty, joy to joy? It is an awful proof that you have no real religion if you are satisfied

with what you have. A degree of experience, however small, would stimulate; the relish would provoke the appetite; and having "tasted that the Lord is gracious," your language would be, "evermore give us this bread." III. SOME ADMONITIONS WITH REGARD TO YOUR FUTURE EFFORTS. 1. Shake off indolence. Nothing is more injurious to our progress; and, alas! nothing is more common. Man loves indulgence; he needs a stimulus, to make him arise from the bed of sloth, to exert his faculties, and to employ the means of which he is possessed. And one would naturally conclude that in religion he would find it. As he sits at ease revelation draws back the veil, and shows him the most astonishing realities—an eternal world; whatever can sting with motive; whatever can alarm with fear; whatever can animate with hope. What a Being to please, on whom it depends to save or to destroy! What a state of misery is there to escape! What an infinite happiness to secure! 2. Beware of diversion. Discharge yourself as much as possible from superfluous cares. Distinguish between diligence in lawful business and "entangling yourselves in the affairs of this life." There are not only diversions from religion, but diversions in it; and of these also you are to beware. Here, finding you are unsuspicious of danger, the enemy often succeeds; for his end is frequently answered by things good in themselves. He is satisfied if he can draw off your attention from great things, and engross it with little ones; if he can make you prefer opinions to practice, and controversy to devotion. 3. Guard against despondency. There are indeed many things which, when viewed alone, have a tendency to discourage the mind. We know your weakness, and we know the difficulties and dangers to which you are exposed. But you have the promise of a faithful God. 4. Be afraid of presumption. Our dependence upon God is absolute and universal. "In Him we live, and move, and have our being." His agency is more indispensable in spiritual things than in natural; sin has rendered us peculiarly weak, helpless, and disaffected. 5. It would be profitable for you to "call to remembrance the former days," and especially to review the beginning of your religious course. 6. It will not be less profitable for you to look forward, and survey the close of all. Christians! "it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is your salvation nearer." Would you slumber on the verge of heaven? The stream increases as it approximates the sea; motion accelerates as it approaches the centre. (*W. Jay.*) *Territory yet to be taken by the Church:*—Who in the sketch of the inheritance given by God, the outline of the borders assigned to them in the grant of heaven, and sealed by covenant oath, could, in this seat of plenty and portion of the Church, behold with satisfaction and content so much of what mercy had made their own, still retained under the dominion of darkness, and occupied to the keeping out of their full right the true heirs of promise? Who, whatever his achievements in conquest and attainments in grace, but in this view feels the confined results of all his operations, and sees on every hand very much land yet to be possessed? Notwithstanding all that has been achieved by the Church of God, the spiritual inclosures of grace, and those precious plants of righteousness, where once grew the thorn and the briar, none whose contemplations seldom reach beyond such beauteous spots of mercy, such flourishing vineyards of grace, can possibly conceive of the melancholy darkness which still broods over by far the greater part of the land, those moral wastes of ignorance and corruption which everywhere meet the eye and distress the heart of the Christian traveller. Ah! what extensive wastes of sin everywhere meet the eye, for the cultivation of which but few hands are found! Vast multitudes in the possession of intelligence, and bearing the stamp of immortality, are living without the fear of God, or any hope of futurity, as indifferent to all the momentous concerns of eternity as they are ignorant of all the affecting realities of the gospel. The worldly-mindedness, profligacy, and pride of the rich, and their prevailing disregard of all that is serious and devout, demonstrate that they are equally without God and without hope in the world, and, till renewed by grace, or removed by death, are the pollution and burden of the place where they live. These are the Anakims, a people tall and strong, and as the sons of Anak, a gigantic race, who in their power and influence contract the inheritance of the saints, and hold them from a more enlarged possession, till the powers of heaven subdue or destroy. But with the promise of an inheritance wide as the world, and stretched in its extent to the remotest boundaries of the earth, how much, very much land yet remaineth to be possessed! (*W. Seaton.*) *More beyond:*—Spain inscribed on her coins the picture of the pillars of Hercules, which stood on either side of the Straits of Gibraltar, the extreme boundary of her empire, with only an unexplored ocean beyond; and on the scroll over them was written,

"*Ne plus ultra*"—nothing beyond. But afterwards, when Columbus had discovered America, Spain struck out the negative and left the inscription, "*Plus ultra*"—more beyond.

CHAPTER XIV.

Vers. 1–5. By lot was their inheritance.—*The tribes apportioned:*—As the whole inheritance was the gift of God, so each one's share was assigned to him by His appointment. Not even Joshua himself in a display of the greatest wisdom and impartiality could have yielded satisfaction in a matter where so many, and all of one family, were concerned. Only the authority of the Father, who had entailed upon them as His redeemed children this common patrimony, could decide the portion of each tribe and of each family. This may yield great satisfaction to the heirs of promise, who are looking for a share in the heavenly inheritance. There, whatever degree of station, difference of capacity, or diversity of possession may exist, no one but will find his inheritance all he could desire and enjoy, and for ever beyond the possibility of becoming a cause of dissatisfaction to himself or of envy to others. To animate the hopes of the believer, and quicken his desires after it, an outline is presented in the descriptions of heavenly promise. Oh, for a realising faith, that elevation and meekness which characterise the high-born sons of God, and which by present hopes wean the heart from earthly bliss and sublimate its affections to highest joys. The portion of inheritance that fell to the members of this great family was, agreeably to previous instructions in the wilderness, determined by lot; and was to be viewed not as the result of chance, but as the wise and gracious appointment of their heavenly Father. No one but had reason to be satisfied with his portion, and to consider it assigned him with the indisputable exactness of a last will and testament. What a sweet thought to the true spiritual Church of God, the heirs of grace and glory, both with respect to their present condition and their future inheritance! He who did not overlook one tribe or family in the earthly Canaan, but provided for them as few or many, now, though the lot is differently determined, as minutely fixes the bounds of His people's habitations, and manages all their affairs. Nor less exact will appear the eternal consummation of His goodness, in the final results of providence, and completion of His covenant purpose. (*W. Seaton.*)

Vers. 6–15. **Caleb . . . said . . . the Lord hath kept me alive, as He said.**—*Caleb's reflection on the goodness and faithfulness of God to him:*—I. It is God that keepeth us alive. The Scriptures often remind us of this, and urge it as a motive to religious fear, gratitude, and obedience. They teach us "that in Him we live and move and have our being: that in Him is the breath of every living thing and the spirit of all mankind"; that He gave it at first and that He taketh it away. More particularly, God preserveth us from many accidents that would be fatal to us. "He giveth His angels charge over us, to keep us in all our ways." II. The aged have peculiar reason to make this acknowledgment. When any arrive at old age, it is proper to do this, with peculiar seriousness and gratitude; considering that, like Caleb, they have been wandering all their days in a wilderness. Dangers surround us on every side. The aged cannot but often reflect upon this; what numbers they have survived! Their own infirmities render the acknowledgment of God's preservation of them almost natural and peculiarly proper. III. It is a great satisfaction to aged Christians to reflect on their obedience to God, and the accomplishment of His promises to them. They recollect with gratitude and delight, that grace, which began, maintained and improved the Divine life in their souls, amidst innumerable temptations, from without and within; and though they have fallen into trouble, they have been prevented from making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. It is pleasant to them to trace up all these streams to the fountain; to consider them as the displays of rich and free grace; as the accomplishment of the promises of God, and proofs of His fidelity. Their mercies were sweet in the enjoyment, and are sweet in the reflection, when they consider them as founded on the covenant of grace, made with all true believers through Christ Jesus. IV. The experience which aged saints have had of God's goodness and faithfulness is a strong encouragement to them to hope and trust in Him. Application: 1. Let us all remember our constant dependence upon God, and learn those useful

instructions which that is adapted to teach us. 2. What hath been said should be an inducement to young persons to follow the Lord fully. Instead of "possessing the iniquities of your youth," you will have unspeakable pleasure in being able to appeal to God, with Hezekiah, "that you have walked before Him in truth, and with an upright heart, and have done that which was good in His sight." 3. The example of Caleb is worthy the imitation of aged Christians. When, like Caleb, you are mentioning your age, your contemporaries, or what happened in the former part of your lives, let it be done with seriousness, with an humble and thankful acknowledgment of God. Further, let the remainder of your lives be faithfully devoted to God's service. One important branch of this is humbly to relate your own experience for the instruction and consolation of others. (*J. Orton.*) *Caleb's confession:*—We meet with old men who are continually asking us, with a slight twinkle in their eye, "How old do you think I am?" and the answer, of course, is meant to bring out that you never would dream that they were such veterans in years, they are so fresh, and sprightly, and springy. That is an evil thing, and would have been evil in Caleb but for this saving clause, "Behold, the Lord hath kept me alive." That is the saving clause, my green and vigorous aged friend, with whom all things have prospered. See to it that boastfulness be not found in your heart. Let not that "dead fly" spoil your ointment, Do not give to yourself the credit and glory of your strength and prowess of body, and brain, and mind. Give all the glory where all is due. "The Lord hath kept me alive." I want you to notice this also about Caleb. He says, "I have wholly followed the Lord my God"; and in the Hebrew that is quite a striking word—more striking than in the English. It is a pictorial word in the Hebrew, and describes a ship going out at full sail. Why, that is the very keynote of Caleb from beginning to end. He was the man he was, from the beginning to the end, because he was out and out—because there were no limitations and provisions with him. He was not a man who, as Paul would say, "made provision for the flesh for the lust thereof"; but having been called by God to His service, he made it his meat and his drink. He "went in" for God and His cause, like a ship in full sail. He flung every power of body, and soul, and spirit like a free sheet to the winds of God's grace, and God's Spirit, and God's Providence. He "let go." Young fellow, it is the ruin of you that you are holding back. You will never be a Caleb; you will never be a Joshua; you will never be a David—never, never—at this rate of it; hanging back and saving your life, and therefore losing it; taking so much of the programme because it fits you, and scoring out certain other items that you do not like. Go in for a full programme, if you would enjoy Christian life. (*John McNeill.*) *Joshua's grateful retrospect:*—A great Alpine climber was asked about the ascent of a high mountain, and said, "I was very weary before I got to the top, and found the best plan was just to follow the guide in front of me. At the summit I turned round, and when I saw the grand view, and the dangers through which the guide had brought me, I felt I could have fallen down on my knees to thank him for having led me to such a wonderful place." (*Our Own Magazine.*) I am as strong this day as I was.—*Caleb—youth in old age:*—I. A LIFE BUILT ON GOD'S PROMISE. Five times in his short speech does he refer to the word which "the Lord spake." The word of promise to Caleb dealt with two things—his prolonged life and his possession of the land "whereinto he went" (Num. xiv. 24). For five and forty years he had kept this word "hid in his heart," and now he puts out a hand, unweakened by age and long-delayed fulfilment, to grasp the realisation—a grand example of steady, persistent faith, which waits for the vision, though it tarry, and buoyantly welcomes it when it comes at last! A life thus filled with trust in God's faithful word has ever present instalments of accomplishment, as brooks by the way, to keep its hope fresh. The prolongation of Caleb's life was the pledge to him of the fulfilment of the remoter promise. Such a life is consciously surrounded with Divine operations, too plain to be ignored, and when looked at in retrospect, presents one solid and homogeneous mass of preserving providences, which are all summed up in saying, "Behold, the Lord hath kept me alive, as He spake, . . . while Israel walked in the wilderness." Such a life has hope burning as a guiding star to the very end. The hopes of age are few and tremulous, if they be limited to earth. When the feast is near an end, appetite is dulled, and there is little to do but to get up and go away. But if we set our hope on God, our hope is immortal. He keeps the good wine till the last. II. A LIFE WHICH BEARS BEING REMEMBERED. We may freely admit that the tone of this retrospect savours of an earlier stage in the process of revelation than ours, and that, if this were a complete

account given by a man of his life, we should miss in it the voice of humble penitence, which must always sound through a Christian autobiography. But still, a life of trust and following Christ, however imperfectly, does yield calm remembrances, which nothing else does, and for the lack of which nothing can compensate. If we would lay up for ourselves against old age the treasure of such calm and humble memories, we must in youth and manhood choose God for our God, and take heed to follow Him, though we may be singular; and to do it wholly.

"I backward cast mine e'e
On prospects drear,"

said poor, brilliant Robert Burns, whose youth of riotous pleasure burnt itself out before he was forty, and had been full of self-reproach and bitterness long before the end. Many a life which grasps at delight and spurns the slow-going puritanical ways of God-fearing, sense-coercing Christians, comes at last to be gnawed by memories sharp and poisonous like a serpent's tooth. The only way to secure that at the end we may be able to say, "I have fought a good fight," is to become Christ's soldier. Recruits for His army are most surely enlisted in youth. III. A LIFE-PRESERVING YOUTHFUL VIGOUR TO OLD AGE. This "old young man," as Thomas Fuller calls him, followed the Lord wholly; therefore he "brought forth fruit in old age," and the aged tree was "full of sap and green" in all its gnarled branches. In a very true sense a man may keep himself young all his days. A youth and manhood of Christian sobriety and self-restraint, temperate, chaste, and free from the "sins of youth," which rot "the bones" and "lie down with" their victims "in the dust," is likely to conserve physical vigour. A life of Christian devotion and faith will keep its spring flowers blowing till late autumn, and blossom and fruit will hang together. The buoyancy, carelessness, hopefulness, cheeriness of youth are not far away from the aged heart, which lives by faith, and therefore dwells at ease, and is glad and secure, though the shadows of evening be falling. IV. A LIFE STILL EAGER AT LAST FOR FURTHER ENTERPRISE. That is the true temper of the Christian soldier, seeking the hardest, not the easiest, work, and finding in danger an attraction. How nobly it has been exemplified in many a mission field, to which, whenever disease has smitten down one, two have been ready to go! An old Highland legend tells how his foster-brothers made a ring round the chief in a battle, and how, as each that shielded him with his own body fell, the foster-father cried, "Another for Hector," and another strode into the fatal empty place. The annals of the Church are full of like incidents. The call for another to stand in some deadly breach for the sake of the elder brother has never been sounded in vain; and to-day American and English Christianity is showing that the old heroic fire burns yet, in the men who, on the Congo and elsewhere, have hazarded their lives for the name of Jesus, and been drawn to the field by its very dangers. (*A. Maclaren. D.D.*) *Caleb's vigour of mind in old age* was equal to his vigour of body in youth. As his strength was in the day that Moses sent him, so was his strength then for war, both to go out and to come in: yea, he had waxed stronger and stronger, and, as is said of the righteous, "brought forth fruit in old age." As all other graces, true faith increases in its exercise, and becomes mightier by conflict. They who are strong in faith when young, and have the word of God abiding in them, are not likely to become weak in faith when old. Interesting sight, to behold one grown old in the service of God, still a veteran in the ranks, with a resolution never to yield or return his sword, while an enemy remains unsubdued. One had thought it now time for this old warrior to leave the field, and quietly to enjoy his earthly portion; and had his mind been affected less with things future than things present, had he sought rest only in Canaan, and not rest in heaven, he would have so thought himself. It is a lovely sight, and what must command admiration from all, to see an old believer to the very last ready to testify his faith in God and hope of the promise by a sacrifice of ease, and even at the hazard of life. But they may well be inspired with the fortitude of unyielding valour, and fight even till they die, who are under the command of Jehovah and the banner of the Cross; for a crown of life and eternal triumphs await the slain—they shall rise and reign for ever in the kingdom of glory. The Christian, whose brightest portion lies beyond this world, must not wonder if, as age creeps on, new conflicts arise, and if at last, before he take possession of his eternal settlement, the Anakims, a people tall and great, should still be to be conquered. They are all an easy conquest through Him that hath loved us, so that he may say as Caleb (ver. 12). (*W. Seaton.*)

Give me this mountain.—*Caleb's choice* :—1. In this choice we find a revelation of a sturdy character. There is a powerful individuality about the man who chooses a mountain as his ideal possession. It means climbing and hard work. I knew a veteran who, late in life, bought a rugged mountain, built his house in one of its hollows, cultivated a portion of its slope, and let his sheep wander for a living over the remaining portion. He was as happy in breathing the clear mountain air, and in climbing the mountain steeps, as Adam was in Paradise. There was wonderful congeniality between him and his surroundings. There was a great deal of rugged grandeur about him. To come into contact with that man was as bracing as to climb his mountain, and to breathe the pure inspiring air upon its summit. In Caleb we have a man of similar robust make—a man who not only chose the mountainous district of Hebron while others sought the plains, but also chose that mountain while as yet every crevice in its fastnesses bristled with foes of giant stature. Caleb was charmed with the thought of a possession which involved most of faith and heroism in making his own. 2. This choice further reveals to us the continuity of his character. It is the brave man who stood before Israel and the ten spies who brought depressing news of the land, and exclaimed, "Let us go up at once and possess it," that now, forty years later, claims it as his privilege to drive the sons of Anak out of their last fastness. He had done enough to wear out half a dozen ordinary men. There seemed to be endless wear in him. This is the speech of an old soldier. You trace the same man, and he affirms—and gives proof of his affirmation subsequently—that he has the same vigour as of old. Throughout his life we trace one master-feeling, one supreme purpose, one distinctive personality. This unity running through life is one of the glories of a great character. 3. Caleb's choice shows his hopefulness and faith. We are not so surprised that when forty-five years of age he should have taken such a bright view of things, as that now in prospect of such a difficult task he should say, "If so be that the Lord be with me, then——" This is not the "if" of doubt, but the "if" of great possibilities, of a large hope, and of a mighty faith (R.V.). "It may be that the Lord will be with me, and I shall drive," &c. He is willing to risk all upon that "may be." He bases all upon what the Lord had promised. 4. This choice shows Caleb's wisdom. The mountain fastnesses of the land were the most difficult to win, but having been once won could best be held, and would finally become the greatest centres of strength. It is a general rule of life that what is hardest won is worth the winning most, and is the most lasting good when won. The strength of a life as well as of a country is in its mountain fastnesses and passes, and not in its broad and luxuriant plains. 5. The whole incident reveals the sacredness which Caleb and Joshua attached to a promise given by Moses forty years previously. Moses was dead, but the promise lived. Caleb repeated it, and Joshua honoured it. 6. Observe how the name of a comparatively unknown father is connected with the choice now made by a noble son. Caleb is usually designated as the "son of Jephunneh." Jephunneh seems to have belonged to an Edomite tribe, the Kenezites, but all that we know of him besides is that he was the father of Caleb. All that we know, too, of Nun is that he was the father of Joshua. These were two noble sons who made their fathers famous. Young men, take note of that! How largely the father's reputation is in the hands of his son! "A wise son maketh a glad father." (*D. Davies.*)

Hebron therefore became the inheritance of Caleb . . . because that he wholly followed the Lord.—*God rewards His faithful followers* :—I. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN CALEB'S FOLLOWING THE LORD WHOLLY. Though this may imply a great deal, yet it cannot imply absolute perfection. 1. It implies that his heart was renewed. He had a filial, dutiful, submissive spirit, which the Scripture calls a perfect heart. 2. It implies that he paid an external respect to all the intimations of His will. If he had allowed himself in one sin, or habitually offended in one point, he would have been guilty of all. It is essential to the character of a good man to follow the Lord in all His precepts and appointments. "This is the love of God that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not grievous." 3. This amiable character implies that he persevered in obedience under every trial and temptation. Such a sincere, uniform, and constant course of obedience, for forty or fifty years, fully verified the Divine declaration that "he wholly followed the Lord God of Israel." But this is not all. God not only approved, but rewarded his obedience. II. WHY THE LORD REWARDED HIM FOR FOLLOWING HIM WHOLLY. 1. Because his wholly following the Lord was a strong expression of his supreme love to Him. Obedience is the natural expression of love. "Ye are My friends," says Christ, "if ye do whatsoever I command you." Neither the hosts of Pharaoh, nor the absence

of Moses, nor the defection of Aaron, nor the giants of Canaan, could cool his zeal or warp his resolution. He determined to endure unto the end; and unto the end he endured. He loved God sincerely and supremely, and he meant to express his love to Him, by uniform obedience, under the most trying circumstances. This God saw, approved, and rewarded, agreeably to His own declaration, "I love them that love Me; and those that seek Me early shall find Me." 2. Caleb greatly promoted the glory of God and the good of His people, by his uniform and persevering obedience. This rendered him one of the principal instruments in the hand of God of conducting His people to Canaan, and of executing His wise and gracious purposes respecting them. By walking with God, and observing His wise and holy providence, he became a man of great experimental and practical knowledge, which enabled him to be very useful in guiding and instructing an ignorant and refractory people. It is natural to suppose that he had a principal hand in forming the lives and manners of that generation, which was educated in the wilderness, and eventually prepared for the promised inheritance. And his great and extensive usefulness was a good reason why the Lord God of Israel should reward his signal services, agreeably to His own maxim, "Them that honour Me, I will honour." 3. There was something very distinguishing in Caleb's conduct. None but he and Joshua persevered in their allegiance to God. This singularity of his obedience not only displayed, but really enhanced, the worth of his virtue and piety, and laid a proper foundation for God to reward him with peculiar marks of His favour. Reflections: 1. What great encouragement have all true saints to persevere in the ways of well-doing! 2. What great benefit may those, who follow the Lord wholly, derive from the evils and burdens of their wearisome pilgrimage! Caleb acquired a beautiful character, and a distinguished reward, by properly improving a series of great and complicated trials. He learned obedience by the things which he suffered. 3. How will saints hereafter admire the distinguishing grace of God by which they were conducted to heaven! 4. Does God speak respectfully of those who follow Him wholly, and graciously reward their faithful labours? Then we must justly conclude that we ought to honour those whom He delights to honour. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*)

Following the Lord:—I. WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THE EXPRESSION, "WHOLLY FOLLOWING THE LORD"? It is impossible to take the words in their strictly literal sense. There are so many slips, so many wanderings, so many shortcomings, that the strict perfection of obedience is unattainable by any of the children of Adam. But the expression is one which, nevertheless, can be applied to those who honestly and simply give themselves up through Divine grace to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. 1. A realisation that the will of God is paramount. 2. A resting upon the Word of God as clear and authoritative. 3. A laying hold of the promises of God as sure. II. THE CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH IT IS SAID OF CALEB THAT HE WHOLLY FOLLOWED GOD. 1. Caleb wholly followed God, though others who were in the same position of influence with himself deserted the side of God and of His truth. 2. Caleb wholly followed God, though the whole congregation feared to walk in the right way. 3. Caleb wholly followed the Lord in spite of opposition. The current of excited feeling set dead against him, and threatened to bear him down. And you will observe that it was not the mere opposition of abuse, insult, and prejudice; it assumed a far more dangerous form (Num. xiv. 10). His life was perilled. Yet no degree of violence, however determined, could drive him from the position which he had been enabled to take up. Oh, what encouragement there is here for those who find themselves in the midst of difficulties and trial for the sake of the Gospel! Caleb was a man of like passions with ourselves. Naturally he had the same aversion to the will of God that others have; but in his case grace was strong, faith triumphed. And what a glorious sight it is to see, when you behold one thus meeting any storm of indignation, coldness, or scorn from man, rather than forsake the way and truth of the Lord Jesus! (*C. D. Marston, M.A.*)

Caleb the soldier:—I. CALEB'S FIDELITY. Fidelity is one of the first properties of a soldier; and it were well that every good cause, and especially that of Christ, could boast of such fidelity as gallant men have often shown in the ranks of war. Mere boys have bravely carried the colours of their regiment into battle; and to save them from falling into the hands of the enemy they have been known, when they themselves fell, to wrap them around their bodies and die within their encrimsoned folds. An incident more heroic still occurred on one of those fields where Austria lately suffered disastrous defeat. When the bloody fight was over, and the victors were removing the wounded, they came on a young Austrian stretched on the ground, whose life was pouring out in the red streams of a ghastly wound. To their

astonishment he declined their kind services. Recommending others to be removed, he implored them, though he might still have been saved, to let him alone. On returning sometime afterwards they found him dead—all his battles o'er. But the mystery was explained. They raised the body to give it burial; and there, below him, lay the colours of his regiment. He had sworn not to part with them; and though he clung to life, and tenderly thought of a mother and sisters in their distant home, he would not purchase recovery at the price of his oath and the expense of a soldier's honour—"he was faithful unto death." The property of a good soldier was eminently illustrated by Caleb. II. CALEB'S COURAGE. Courage, which has in all ages won the praise of poets and admiration of mankind, is a property for which our seamen and soldiers have been long and eminently distinguished. Descended from ancestors who met the Romans on the sea-beach, and those brave Norsemen who ploughed the stormiest oceans with their warlike prows, our countrymen have proved themselves worthy of their sires; and the repute of a courage which has been tested in many a hard-fought field has proved, under God, the strongest bulwark of our island-home. It is remarkable, and highly creditable to the resolution and bravery of our soldiers, that, notwithstanding all the wars in which they have engaged, no foreign nation flaunts a flag of ours as the trophy of its victory, and of our defeat. No British banner, so far as I know, hangs drooping in dusty folds from the walls of foreign castle or cathedral to make us blush; nor in that proud pillar the great Napoleon raised, whose bronze, formed of the cannon taken by him in battle, commemorates his victories, is there an ounce of metal that belonged to a British gun. I have heard indeed how cowards, probably drawn from the scum of the people, hung back when the bugler in the trenches sounded a new assault, and refused to cross ground so strewed with their fallen comrades as to resemble a field carpeted with scarlet cloth. Yet, whatever may be their defects, our soldiers have been commonly as much distinguished for their courage when the battle raged as for their clemency when the victory was won. For that courage, true, calm courage, which does not lie in insensibility to danger, nor in the violent animal passion which may bear a coward forward as a whirlwind does the dust, or a wave the seaweed on its foaming crest, Caleb presents the very model of a soldier. How bravely he bears himself when the other spies prove traitors! The source of Caleb's courage, of a bravery so admirable and dauntless, is not far to seek. In him, as in those noble Christian soldiers whom I have mentioned, and in others also who have maintained their religion in the camp, courage, if it did not spring from, was sustained by piety. He had faith in God. Therefore he did not fear the face of man, though that man were a giant, nor of death itself. From the same lofty source, and none other, the soldier of the Cross, he who fights with foes more formidable than giants—the devil, the world, and the flesh, that trinity of evil—is to draw his courage. More of it may be needed to face the jeers of an ungodly world than a blazing battery of cannon. (*T. Guthrie, D.D.*) *Caleb's history—piety portrayed and piety promoted:*—I. PIETY PORTRAYED: Caleb "wholly followed the Lord God of Israel." 1. Genuine piety is the sublimest of all pursuits. 2. Genuine piety accords with the constitutional cravings and powers of the human soul. II. PIETY PROMOTED: "Hebron became the inheritance of Caleb." (*Homilist.*) *The inheritance of Caleb:*—Caleb is one of those men whom we meet with seldom in Bible history, but whenever we do meet them we are the better for the meeting. Bright and brave, strong, modest, and cheerful, there is honesty in his face, courage and decision in the very pose of his body, and the calm confidence of faith in his very look and attitude. It is singular that there should be cause to doubt whether his family were originally of the promised seed. On the whole, the preponderance of evidence is in favour of the opinion that Caleb's family were originally outside the covenant, but had become proselytes like Hobab, Rahab, Ruth, and Heber. Their faith was pre-eminently the fruit of conviction, and not the accident of heredity. It had a firmer basis than that of most Israelites. It was woven more closely into the texture of their being, and swayed their lives more powerfully. It is pleasing to think that there may have been many such proselytes; that the promise to Abraham may have attracted souls from the east, and the west, and the north, and the south; that even beyond the limits of the twelve tribes many hearts may have been cheered, and many lives elevated and purified by the promise to him, "In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Caleb and Joshua had believed and acted alike, in opposition to the other ten spies; but Caleb occupies the more prominent place in the story of their heroism and faith. Caleb was evidently the man who led the opposition to the ten,

not only asserting the course of duty, but manifesting the spirit of contempt and defiance toward the faithless cowards that forgot that God was with them. In his inward heart Joshua was quite of his mind, but probably he wanted the energetic manner, the ringing voice, the fearless attitude of his more demonstrative companion. Certain it is that Caleb reaped the chief honour of that day. It is beautiful to see that there was no rivalry between them. Not only did Caleb interpose no remonstrance when Joshua was called to succeed Moses, but he seems all through the wars to have yielded to him the most loyal and hearty submission. His affectionate and cordial bearing on the present occasion seems to show that not even in the corner of his heart did there linger a trace of jealousy toward the old friend and companion whom on that occasion he had surpassed, but who had been set so much higher than himself. He came to him as the recognised leader of the people—as the man whose voice was to decide the question he now submitted, as the judge and arbiter in a matter which very closely concerned him and his house. And yet there are indications of tact on the part of Caleb, of a thorough understanding of the character of Joshua, and of the sort of considerations by which he might be expected to be swayed. "Thou knowest the thing that the Lord said unto Moses the man of God concerning me and thee in Kadesh-barnea." "Moses the man of God." Why does Caleb select that remarkable epithet? Why add anything to the usual name, Moses? The use of the epithet was honouring to all three. That which constituted the highest glory of Moses was that he was so much at one with God. God's will was ever his law, and he was in such close sympathy with God that whatever instructions he gave on any subject might be assumed to be in accordance with God's will. Moreover, in calling him "the man of God" when addressing Joshua, Caleb assumed that Joshua would be impressed by this consideration, and would be disposed to agree to a request which was not only sanctioned by the will of Moses, but by that higher will which Moses constantly recognised. Having fortified his plea with this strong reference at once to Moses and to God, Caleb proceeds to rehearse the service which had led to the promise of Moses. "Forty years old was I when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me," &c. Why does Caleb put the matter in this way? Why does he not couple Joshua with himself as having been faithful on that never-to-be-forgotten occasion? The only explanation that seems feasible is, that from the pre-eminent position of Joshua this was unnecessary, perhaps it might have appeared even unbecoming. A soldier making a request of the Duke of Wellington, and recalling some service he had done at the battle of Waterloo, would hardly think it necessary, or even becoming, to say how the Duke, too, had been there, and what surpassing service he had rendered on that day. "I brought him word again, as it was in my heart." The statement is made in no boasting spirit, and yet what a rare virtue it denotes! Caleb, as we now say, had the courage of his convictions. To break away from your own set, from the comrades of your campaign, to upset their plans, and counsel those in power to a course diametrically opposed to theirs, is one of the most difficult of social duties. The men that have the courage of their convictions are often social martyrs, shut out from the fellowship of their brethren, shut out from every berth of honour or emolument, and yet, for their courage and honesty, worthy of infinitely higher regard than whole hundreds of the time-servers that "get on" in the world by humouring its errors and its follies. Nevertheless, though most of us show ourselves miserably weak by not speaking out all that is "in our hearts," especially when the honour of our Lord and Master is concerned, we are able to appreciate and cannot fail to admire the noble exhibitions of courage that we sometimes meet with. "He that believeth shall not make haste." Caleb believed, and therefore he was patient. Five-and-forty long years had elapsed since Moses, the man of God, speaking in the Spirit of God, had promised him a particular inheritance in the land. It was a long time for faith to live on a promise, but, like a tree in the face of a cliff that seems to grow out of the solid rock, it derived nourishment from unseen sources. It was a long time to be looking forward; but Caleb, though he did not receive the promise during all that time, was persuaded of it and embraced it, and believed that at last it would come true. It seems that when acting as one of the twelve spies, Caleb had in some emphatic way taken his stand on Hebron. "The land on which thy foot hath trodden will be an inheritance to thee." Perhaps the spies were too terrified to approach Hebron, for the sons of the Anakim were there, and, in the confidence of faith, Caleb, or Caleb and Joshua, had gone into it alone. Moses had promised him Hebron, and now he came to claim it under circumstances that would have induced

most men to let it alone. The driving out of the Anakim was a formidable duty, and the task might have seemed more suitable for one who had the strength and enthusiasm of youth on his side. But Caleb, though eighty-five, was yet young. Age is not best measured by years. He was a remarkable instance of prolonged vigour and youthful energy. "As yet I am as strong," &c. As one reads these words of Caleb, one recalls the saying of a well-known physician, Dr. Richardson, that the human frame might last for a hundred years if it were only treated aright. There is something singularly touching in Caleb's asking as a favour what was really a most hazardous but important service to the nation. Rough though these Hebrew soldiers were, they were capable of the most gentlemanly and chivalrous acts. There can be no higher act of courtesy than to treat as a favour to yourself what is really a great service to another. Well done, Caleb! In the spiritual warfare, too, we do not want instances of the same spirit. We recall Captain Allan Gardiner choosing Tierra del Fuego as his mission sphere just because the people were so ferocious, the climate so repulsive, and the work so difficult that no one else was likely to take it up. We think of the second band who went out after Gardiner and his companions had been starved to death; and still more, after these were massacred by the natives, of the third detachment who were moved simply by the consideration that the case was seemingly so desperate. Or we think of Livingstone begging the directors of the London Missionary Society, wherever they sent him, to be sure that it was "Forward"; turning aside from all previous missionary stations, and the comparative ease they afforded, to grapple with the barbarian where he had never begun to be tamed; his eyes thirsting for unknown scenes and untried dangers, because he scorned to build on the foundation of others, and thirsted for "fresh woods and pastures new." We think of him persevering in his task from year to year in the same lofty spirit; disregarding the misery of protracted pain, the intense longings of his weary heart for home. A crowd of noble names comes to our recollection—Williams, and Judson, and Morrison, and Burns, and Patteson, and Keith-Falconer, and Hannington, and Mackay—men for whom even the Anakim had no terrors, but rather an attraction; but who, serving under another Joshua, differed from Caleb in this, that what they desired was not to destroy these ferocious Anakim, but to conquer them by love, and to demonstrate the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to change the vilest reprobates into sons of God. (*W. G. Blaikie, D.D.*) *Caleb the Kenezite*:—I. IN ALL PROBABILITY CALEB WAS A PROSELYTE. In Gen. xxxvi. 42, Kenaz is named as one of the Edomite "dukes." In 1 Chron. ii. 50, Caleb is called "son of Hur." Many critics assume that this indicates that he was adopted into the family of Hur. This foreigner had the true faith of an Israelite. Sometimes those whose early years have been spent in heathenism, home or foreign, become noted in Christian circles for their moral virtues and foremost in every good work. II. CALEB HAD THE COURAGE TO BE IN A MINORITY OF TWO (Num. xiv. 1–10). The secret of this courage was—1. His faith in God's promise. 2. That the Lord put His fear upon their enemies (Num. xiv. 9). 3. His sense of the Divine presence. III. CALEB'S WHOLE CONDUCT WAS CONSISTENT. "I wholly followed" may mean—1. The full measure of his days. 2. The whole-heartedness of his life. IV. AT THE END OF HIS CAREER HE RECEIVES HIS REWARD. 1. A happy old age. 2. An unfailing faith in God. 3. The people acknowledge his faithful service. 4. The seed of Caleb received the benefit resulting from the father's fidelity. (*Henry Smith.*) *Caleb's inheritance*:—I. AN OLD MAN'S INHERITANCE. Old age has its benedictions, its redeemed pledges, its inheritance. The faithful, tireless servant of God has his portion, though he has not gathered, sold, and joined field to field. Caleb had been seeking for a country, not scattering an estate. II. AN OLD MAN'S REQUEST. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints"; but the life approaching the grave with a weight of honourable service is alike cherished by the Lord. It must have been so with Caleb. His strength was as great for war as when he received his commission. The old man does not ask for land he may cultivate, on which to raise choice varieties of those grapes whose single clusters weary two men to bear them on a staff. He has led the life of a soldier His service for the Lord he thinks still lies in that direction. Those giants who frightened his comrades forty years ago have been on his mind ever since. The Israelites are not likely to become more warlike in this rich country where they can till the soil. He therefore proposes to take care of those enemies of God himself. When Herod the Great wished to rid the cliffs of Arbela of robbers, he caused Roman soldiers to be let down in cages to fight the outlaws in the mouths of their caves. Caleb did not ask for a Hebrew regiment to

help him manage those sons of Anak. Hebron, that ancient city built seven years before Zoan in Egypt, ought not to remain longer in the hand of the infidel. Alien born or Hebrew, he cannot bear that God's people should be defied in their inheritance. In after-years, when crusading knights took this city, it was not with more righteous purpose than that which stirred the heart of this ancient servant of Jehovah. III. AN OLD MAN'S BEQUEST. Caleb's first work was to purify his inheritance. He got the iniquity out of it. He did not levy tribute on the brigands and live luxuriously on the income of robbery. This veteran was not a man of compromises. The enemies of God and righteousness could get no terms with him. His hands were not soiled with the revenue or the rents of a nefarious business. They did not close around the rewards of iniquity. Something of the spirit which in after-years stirred the heart of the Master as He drove the money-changers from the temple now rested on this old man. The spirit of reform was strong in him, and it had fuel to keep it burning, for it was fed by the Spirit of God and of righteousness. That mountain was not first cleared of timber, and lawns, parks, and terraces laid out and built on its slopes. There was perhaps no summer-house commanding a view of the distant Mediterranean, but there was some honourable estate to pass onward. There was a remainder which, according to Divine promise, would go to his descendants. It was cleared of the enemies of God. Whoever received it would get an inheritance without any bill of attainder against it for treason. Such a man as Caleb does not impoverish his estate, though he lessen it in behalf of righteousness. The bare mountain was to him a better property than a large rent-roll of criminal tenants. (*W. R. Campbell.*) *Caleb's reward*:—Caleb's reward illustrates the immense difference between a full and a partial following of God. It is the difference between the river and the sea. Both are water, and the river is all well in its way and is useful to man and beast in small services. The sea is something more than mere water, for it is infinite; and as we gaze upon it a sense of its immeasurableness comes over us as never is the case when we behold the largest lake or the Mississippi river. You cannot measure a wholly-following servant of the living God, and you can too easily take the dimensions of a half-and-half Christian. You come to form an idea of about how much money he will give to a needy enterprise, about how much time to a pressing work, how long he will stay to push a fresh project in the kingdom, and what pleasures and business engagements he will surrender to help revival efforts. We get tired of these easy measurements. But take a Caleb, and you cannot tell what Divine energies are locked up within him to come forth when needed. I. ONE WITH CALEB'S SPIRIT SEES CLEARLY THE GOOD THINGS WHICH GOD HAS PROMISED. He has sight and insight. Twelve good men go over the same country, but on the whole they see differently, and so report what they see. Ten, with a common-sense vision of the greatness of the foes, and making no allowance for hidden and supernatural factors, did not see things as they were. On the other hand, Caleb saw all that they did, but he had a power of seeing Him who is invisible, and so of seeing truly. The man who followed fully had a clear eye, a single eye, and his whole body was full of light. In this way he perceived the essential weakness and rottenness of confederated evil. All achieving men have the same vision, and so they persist and wait and return to the same attack until they win the day, and the people that once bade stone them bring out garlands for their graves. II. MEN OF CALEB'S SPIRIT, WHOLLY FOLLOWING THE LORD, HAVE THE POWER OF STANDING ALONE. The mass move with the stream. The few stand like a rock. No one knows who has not tried it what it costs the soul of self-searching, fear, doubt, sorrowful parting with loved friends, and the crushing weight of popular disapproval. In one of his noblest odes Horace speaks in admiration of him who can resist the heated demands of citizens who call for evil things. III. THOSE WHO ARE LIKE CALEB HAVE THE PATIENCE OF FAITH. It was a long and wearisome time before the word of God to His trusty servant was fulfilled—more than a whole generation. No doubt sometimes, for he was human, he wondered when God would arise and His enemies be scattered. Have you seen some new possession in the things of the Spirit? Repeat the promise. Though it tarry, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not tarry. We get tired and run away from our own prayers, so that when the answer comes some one else lives where we did when we prayed. Oh, let us seek the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ! IV. MEN OF CALEB'S SPIRIT HAVE TO FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT OF FAITH. Hebron was beautifully situated upon the hills to the south of Jerusalem, where even to-day there is a luxuriant vegetation and the grapes as of Eschol are gathered. From it one looks over a wide expanse of country, eastward, westward,

northward, southward, towards Edom. There David was crowned and reigned seven years. It was a splendid reward after forty-three years' delay. Perhaps on the great expedition with the spies Caleb marked the place and made a vow that, if the people entered in, he would have that abode, and the picture may have dwelt in his memory to cheer him in long years, just as the heavenly hills glow before the eye of Christian faith. But even at last the prize did not drop into his hands like a ripe apple. No; he must draw his sword and expel the sons of Anak who were in possession, for they also loved the high places. It costs to get the best, but it is wise economy to be satisfied with nothing less. Faith, the patience of faith, the fight of faith, the reward of faith—these come before us in this ancient story with the freshness of the Word of God. And now it remains to be said that there is a peculiar need of Calebs to-day, when great things are offered us in the providences of God and we have not far to go to enter into them. Make it personal. Sometimes the Spirit shows you while you are praying or reading or listening to others an attainment beyond all you have ever reached. It is your Hebron. No matter what the precise form of the blessing, if you have had it clearly set before you, it is a call to possess it by faith, just as Caleb went up to his reward among the hills of Palestine. All that your feet press is yours. Saints are more to blame for not walking upon the high places as children of the heavenly King than sinners are for not turning to God in penitence. Saints have great promises made to them and great helps offered them. Make it more general. Before the whole Church to-day there is a promised world to be won for Christ by prayer and toil. Our charter gives it to us for a possession, and the doors are wide for our entrance therein. Another field for faith is the deeper Christianising of the already Christian nations of the earth. Dr. Herron says in his little book, "The Larger Christ": "The realisation of heaven upon earth is more than a mystic ideal. It is the crowning fact of history. It is the solid reality with which God is displacing the insubstantial materialism underlying the rude social structures of human selfishness. It is the Divine errand upon which white-souled prophets have walked serene through a world ablaze with scorn. The pledge of God is behind it, and the victorious forces of the universe are allied in its behalf. The Bible is its written warrant and the Cross its seal which none can break. It may take us with violence, but it advances to conquer. And the saints shall judge the world!" (*Edward N. Packard.*)

CHAPTER XV.

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPS. XV.–XIX.—*The law of distribution*:—We come now in earnest to the distribution of the land. The narrative looks very bare, but important principles and lessons underlie it. These lists of unfamiliar names look like the *débris* of a quarry—hard, meaningless, and to us useless. But nothing is inserted in the Bible without a purpose—a purpose that in some sense bears on the edification of the successive generations and the various races of men. 1. There is something to be learned from the maintenance of the distinction of the twelve tribes and the distribution of the country into portions corresponding to each. In some degree this was in accordance with Oriental usage; for the country had already been occupied by various races, dwelling in a kind of unity—the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Hivites, Jebusites, Perizzites, and Girgashites. What was peculiar to Israel was that each of the tribes was descended from one of Jacob's sons, and that their relation to each other was conspicuously maintained, though their dwelling-places were apart. As in the case of the separate states of North America, or the separate cantons of Switzerland, it provided for variety in unity; it gave a measure of local freedom and independence, while it maintained united action; it contributed to the life and vigour of the commonwealth without destroying its oneness of character or impairing its common purpose and aim. It promoted that picturesque variety often found in little countries, where each district has a dialect, or a pronunciation, or traditions, or a character of its own; as Yorkshire differs from Devon, or Lancashire from Cornwall; Aberdeenshire from Berwick, or Fife from Ayr. As in a garden variety of species enlivens and enriches the effect, so in a community variety of type enriches and enlivens the common life. In the case of the Hebrew

commonwealth the distinction of tribes became smaller as time went on, and in New Testament times the three great districts Judæa, Samaria, and Galilee showed only the survival of the fittest. A larger individuality and a wider variety would undoubtedly have prevailed if a good spirit had continued to exist among the tribes, and if all of them had shown the energy and the enterprise of some. But the wrong spirit came in, and came in with a witness, and mischief ensued. For distinctions in race and family are apt to breed rivalry and enmity, and not only to destroy all the good which may come of variety, but to introduce interminable mischief. For many a long day the Scottish clans were like Ishmael, their hand against every man and every man's hand against them; or at least one clan was at interminable feud with another, and the country was wretched and desolate. Among the twelve tribes of Israel the spirit of rivalry soon showed itself, leading to disastrous consequences. Many arrangements of our modern civilisation that conduce to our comfort when in good order become sources of unexampled evil when they go wrong. The drainage of houses conduces much to comfort while it works smoothly; but let the drains become choked, and send back into our houses the poisonous gases bred of decomposition, the consequences are appalling. The sanitary inspector must be on the alert to detect mischief in its very beginnings, and apply the remedy before we have well become conscious of the evil. And so a vigilant eye needs ever to be kept on those arrangements of Providence that are so beneficial when duly carried out, and so pernicious when thoughtlessly perverted. What a wonderful thing is a little forbearance at the beginning of a threatened strife! What a priceless blessing is the soft answer that turneth away wrath! 2. Again, in the allocation of the tribes in their various territories we have an instance of a great natural law, the law of distribution, a law that, on the whole, operates very beneficially throughout the world. In society there is both a centripetal and a centrifugal force; the centripetal chiefly human, the centrifugal chiefly Divine. Men are prone to cluster together; God promotes dispersion. In the early ages they clustered about the plain of Shinar; the confusion of tongues scattered them abroad. And generally, in any fertile and desirable spot, men have been prone to multiply till food has failed them, and either starvation at home or emigration abroad becomes inevitable. And so it is that, in spite of their cohesive tendency, men are now pretty well scattered over the globe. And when once they are settled in new homes, they require adaptation to their locality, and begin to love it. It is a proof of Divine wisdom that a world that presents such a variety of climates and conditions has, in all parts of it, inhabitants that enjoy their life. The same law operates in the vegetable world. Everywhere plants seem to discover the localities where they thrive best. There is always a place for the plant, and a plant for the place. And it is so with animals, too. The elephant in the spreading forest, the rabbit in the sandy down, the beaver beside the stream, the caterpillar in the leafy garden. Some of the great deserts that our imagination used to create in Africa or elsewhere do not exist. Barren spots there are, and "miry places and marshes given to salt," but they are not many. The earth has been replenished, and the purpose of God so far fulfilled. And then there is a distribution of talents. We are not all created alike, with equal dividends of the gifts and faculties that minister in some way to the purposes of our life. We depend more or less on one another; women on men, and men on women; the young on the old, and sometimes the old on the young; persons of one talent on those of another talent, those with strong sinews on those with clear heads, and those with clear heads on those with strong sinews; in short, society is so constituted that what each has he has for all, and what all have they have for each. The principle of the division of labour is brought in; and in a well-ordered community the general wealth and well-being of the whole are better promoted by the interchange of offices than if each person within himself had a little stock of all that he required. The same law of distribution prevails in the Church of Christ. It was exemplified in an interesting way in the case of our Lord's apostles. No one of these was a duplicate of another. And throughout the history of the Church the distribution of gifts has been equally marked. Chrysostom and Augustine, Jerome and Ambrose, Bernard and Anselm, were all of the same stock, but not of the same type. At the Reformation men of marked individuality were provided for every country. The missionary field has in like manner been provided for. India has had her Schwartz, her Carey, her Duff, and a host of others; China her Morrison, Burmah her Judson, Polynesia her Williams, Africa her Livingstone. The most unattractive and inhospitable spots have been supplied. Greenland was not too cold for the

Moravians, nor the leper-stricken communities of India or Africa too repulsive. And never were Christian men more disposed than to-day to honour that great Christian law of distribution—"Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." It was a great providential law, therefore, that was recognised in the partition of the land of Canaan among the tribes. Provision was thus made for so scattering the people that they should occupy the whole country, and become adapted to the places where they settled and to the pursuits proper to them. 3. Still further, in the allocation of the tribes in their various territories we have an instance of the way in which God designed the earth to minister most effectually to the wants of man. We do not say that the method now adopted in Canaan was the only plan of distributing land that God ever sanctioned; very probably it was the same method as had prevailed among the Canaanites; but it is beyond doubt that, such as it was, it was sanctioned by God for His chosen people. It was a system of peasant proprietorship. The whole landed property of the country was divided among the citizens. The extremes of wealth and poverty were alike checked and discouraged, and the lot eulogised by Agur—a moderate competency, neither poverty nor riches—became the general condition of the citizens. It is difficult to tell what extent of land fell to each family. The portion of the land divided by Joshua has been computed at twenty-five million acres. Dividing this by 600,000, the probable number of families at the time of the settlement, we get forty-two acres as the average size of each property. For a Roman citizen, seven acres was counted enough to yield a moderate maintenance, so that even in a country of ordinary productiveness the extent of the Hebrew farms would, before further subdivision became necessary, have been ample. When the population increased the inheritance would of course have to be subdivided. But for several generations this, so far from an inconvenience, would be a positive benefit. It would bring about a more complete development of the resources of the soil. The great rule of the Divine economy was thus honoured—nothing was lost. We in this country, after reaching the extreme on the opposite side, are now trying to get back in the direction of this ancient system. All parties seem now agreed that something of the nature of peasant proprietorship is necessary to solve the agrarian problem in Ireland and in Great Britain too. It is only the fact that in Britain commercial enterprise and emigration afford so many outlets for the energies of our landless countrymen that has tolerated the abuses of property so long among us—the laws of entail and primogeniture, the accumulation of property far beyond the power of the proprietor to oversee or to manage, the employment of land agents acting solely for the proprietor, and without that sense of responsibility or that interest in the welfare of the people which is natural to the proprietor himself. It is little wonder that theories of land-possession have risen up which are as impracticable in fact as they are wild and lawless in principle. Such desperate imaginations are the fruit of despair—absolute hopelessness of getting back in any other way to a true land law—to a state of things in which the land would yield the greatest benefit to the whole nation. 4. In the arrangements for the distribution of the land among the twelve tribes we may note a proof of God's interest in the temporal comfort and prosperity of men. It is not God that has created the antithesis of secular and spiritual, as if the two interests were like a see-saw, so that whenever the one went up the other must go down. Things in this world are made to be enjoyed, and the enjoyment of them is agreeable to the will of God, provided we use them as not abusing them. In ordinary circumstances God intends men to be fairly comfortable; He does not desire life to be a perpetual struggle, or a dismal march to the grave. The very words in which Christ counsels us to consider the lilies and the ravens, instead of worrying ourselves about food and clothing, show this; for, under the Divine plan, the ravens are comfortably fed and the lilies are handsomely clothed. The characteristic of a good man, when he enjoys a share of worldly prosperity, is, that he does not let the world become his idol—it is his servant, it is under his feet; he jealously guards against its becoming his master. His effort is to make a friend of the mammon of unrighteousness, and to turn every portion of it with which he may be entrusted to such a use for the good of others that when at last he gives in his account, as steward to his Divine Master, he may do so with joy, and not with grief. (*W. G. Blaikie, D.D.*)

Vers. 1–12. **This then was the lot of . . . Judah.** — ***The inheritance of Judah*** :—Judah was the imperial tribe, and it was fitting that he should be planted

in a conspicuous territory. Judah and the sons of Joseph seem to have obtained their settlements not only before the other tribes, but in a different manner. They did not obtain them by lot, but apparently by their own choice and by early possession. Judah was not planted in the heart of the country. That position was gained by Ephraim and Manasseh, the children of Joseph, while Judah obtained the southern section. The territory of Judah was not pre-eminently fruitful; it was not equal in this respect to that of Ephraim and Manasseh. It had some fertile tracts, but a considerable part of it was mountainous and barren. It was of four descriptions—the hill country, the valley or low country, the south, and the wilderness. "The hill country," says Dean Stanley, "is the part of Palestine which best exemplifies its characteristic scenery; the rounded hills, the broad valleys, the scanty vegetation, the villages and fortresses, sometimes standing, more frequently in ruins, on the hill tops; the wells in every valley, the vestiges of terraces whether for corn or wine." (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 13–19. To him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife.—*Othniel's conquest of Debir.*—I. THE SPIRIT WHICH INFLUENCED CALEB IN THE DISPOSAL OF ACHSAH. He sought to unite her to a man—(1) Honourable for his zeal and energy; (2) conspicuous for his bravery; (3) and willing to use his strength in the way of the Lord's commandments. (4) It seems likely also that Caleb sought to unite his daughter to one who was in a social station akin to her own. The promise was not to the man who should first enter Kirjath-sepher. This may have been the nature of the similar promise at the siege of Jerusalem, under David, although it seems by no means certain that, even in this instance, David did not refer to the captain who should first bring his company into Jebus and smite the garrison. He should be chief captain (2 Sam. v. 8; 1 Chron. xi. 6). However this may have been, Caleb's promise ran, "He that smiteth Kirjath-sepher, and taketh it, to him," &c. No man single-handed could "smite and take" a fortified city; and thus the promise probably refers to the leaders of the army who were under Caleb. This view has also the advantage that it does not exhibit to us an honourable man like Caleb putting up his daughter as the object of a wretched scramble, where a mere accident of a stumble or a wound might decide whose she should be. Possibly there were but few of the commanders under Caleb officially qualified to lead one or more divisions of the army against Debir; and of these Othniel might first have volunteered, or he only might have volunteered to lead the attack. Any way, out of regard for Achsah, Othniel was one who offered to conduct the assault, and he succeeded. II. THE HARMONY BETWEEN THE FATHER AND THE DAUGHTER. 1. Achsah accorded with her father's will and with the custom of the age. There can be no doubt but that, at this period, a father was held to have an absolute right to the disposal of his daughter's hand (Gen. xxix. 18–28; Exod. xxi. 7–11; 1 Sam. xvii. 25, &c.). It does not follow, however, that a father would not consult his daughter's wishes. 2. She had confidence in her father's love, notwithstanding her recognition of his authority. She asked for a larger dowry (ver. 19). On leaving her father, to cleave to her husband, we thus find her seeking her husband's interest. 3. Her father cheerfully responded to her request. The confidence which was bold to ask was met by an affection which was pleased to bestow. III. THE HONOURABLE CHARACTER IN WHICH THIS BRIEF HISTORY INTRODUCES OTHNIEL. He comes before us as a man of courage, willing to risk his life for the woman he loved. He is seen to perhaps even more advantage in not preferring the request which Achsah prompted him to make. He may have refused to comply with his wife's wishes. The history does not actually say this; it merely shows that Achsah made her request herself. Othniel was bold enough to fight; he seems to have been too manly to have allowed himself to ask for this addition to what was probably already a just and good inheritance. He was brave enough to do battle against Debir; he was not mean enough to beg. If Achsah needed a larger dowry, such a request would come better from herself. (*F. G. Marchant.*) *A chance for ability*:—There begins the test of talent and force and quality in men. The speech is, Come, now! the palm be to the brave, the crown to him who wins it. Up to a certain point all things seem to be appointed, settled, almost arbitrarily distributed; but then there are chances in life that seem to come afterwards, as it were, amongst ourselves, competitions of a personal and social kind. How early this competitive spirit was developed, and how wonderfully it has been preserved through all history! The spirit of Providence seems to say, in homeliest language, now and again, Here is a chance for you; you had something to begin with, to that you can add more, by

pluck, bravery, force—to the war! We need such voices; otherwise we would soon slumber off, and doze away our handful of years, and awake to find that the day had gone. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) **Thou hast given me a south land; give me also springs of water.**—*Noble discontent*:—1. Such noble discontent, such aspiration for higher and better things, should urge us on in the realm of the daily duty. Simply the south land of a measurable and merely respectable discharge of the daily duty should never satisfy us. We should be stirred with a noble discontent for the water springs of the best possible doing it. Thus we transform ourselves from drudges into artists. Thus, too, we compact ourselves in noble character. 2. In the realm of intellectual advance we should be stirred with this noble discontent; we should turn from a merely general and surface and newspaper information toward the springs of water of a thorough and accurate knowledge. 3. In the realm of the best good of the community in which we dwell we should be stirred with a noble discontent. The south land of a merely usual municipal security and order ought not to satisfy us; we should be restless with discontent until the springs of water of a high moral atmosphere and action are predominant. 4. In the realm of Christian experience we ought to be stirred with such noble discontent; we ought to leave behind us the south land of a merely usual and routine experience, and seek the springs of water of the peace and joy and strength of a transfiguring likeness to our Lord (1 Cor. iii. 10, 16). (*W. Hoyt, D.D.*) **The upper springs, and the nether springs.**—*The upper and nether springs*:—I. THE UPPER SPRINGS, AS THEY PICTURE FORTH THE JOY-SOURCES OF THE HIGHER NATURE. "My soul thirsteth for God—the living God!" Nor need we be disappointed. It is pensive to think that some thirsts, and honest thirsts too, must be disappointed. Not to all are given possibilities equal to their desires. Their ideals are above their realisation! But none need be disappointed in God! Christ has opened up a free and full channel of communication. "It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell." We have read of waters in the East which, copious at some times, are scarce at others. To-day the waters pour forth their freshening streams, irrigate the land, and satisfy the thirst of man and beast; to-morrow the faithless well is dry. Not so with Christ. In Him the waters dwell. But more than this, Christ is not only the fulness of God, He is the available fulness for us. 1. Take fellowship with God. Inspired words used about this are not the language of poetic fiction or overwrought religious feeling. They are the actual experiences of meditative, devout, earnest, inspired men. "God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever." 2. Take likeness to God. Who can conceive of a more magnificent ideal than God-life in the soul? Be ye holy as your Father, &c. Be ye followers of God, &c. Herein consists our true life. Not in the mere culture of art-faculty, but in the growth of the moral likeness to God! We become happier as we become more like Him. Less vexed with trifles, less anxious about losses provided they bring gains to the soul, less conformed to the world, more restful in the love of God! 3. Take the service of God. Christ does not call us to His work merely that we may work, that our moral nature may have something to do; the Lord hath need of us. I say this not only dignifies life, it makes it delightful (John iv. 34). These are upper springs! Co-workers together with God! 4. Take the friends of God. These are yours! We are made for each other! Church life is designed to draw forth common sympathies and common purposes. We are pilgrims to the same shrine; soldiers in the same battlefield; fruit-gatherers in the same vineyard; children of the same Father. Thoughtful Christian friendship is one of the choicest blessings we can enjoy. 5. Take the future of God's children. I love to think of them at home there. Upper springs coming from the throne of God and the Lamb: "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more." Shall we drink of those upper springs? I hope so! Do we love Christ now? Do we enjoy His service now? If so, when the morning of eternity comes to us, we shall know in a higher sense than we have ever known on earth the meaning of "the upper springs." II. THE NETHER SPRINGS, AS THEY ILLUSTRATE THE MERE SATISFACTIONS OF THE LOWER NATURE. Take care lest all life plays upon the surface! Take care lest all life's drinking be at the nether springs. I am not now speaking of the grossness of sensualism, but of mere sensationalism. It is possible to live a merely surface life. Let us remember that there are eyes and ears within us, that the invisible world, the world which embraces God and judgment and eternity, is always speaking through many voices to our conscience and heart. Mere earthly aims are nether springs. Some people are always drinking at the springs of position and success. They attempt to please men.

CHAPTER XVI.

VERS. 1–10. The lot of . . . Joseph.—*The inheritance of Joseph:*—Next to Judah, the most important tribe was Joseph; that is, the double tribe to which his two sons gave names, Ephraim and Manasseh. In perpetual acknowledgment of the service rendered by Joseph to the family, by keeping them alive in the famine, it was ordained by Jacob that his two sons should rank with their uncles as founders of tribes (Gen. xlviii. 5). It was also prophetically ordained by Jacob that Ephraim, the younger son, should take rank before Manasseh (Gen. xlviii. 19). The privilege of the double portion, however, remained to Manasseh as the elder son. Hence, in addition to his lot in Gilead and Bashan, he had also a portion in Western Palestine. But Ephraim was otherwise the more important tribe; and when the separation of the two kingdoms took place, Ephraim often gave his name to the larger division. And in the beautiful prophetic vision of Ezekiel, when the coming reunion of the nation is symbolised, it is on this wise (Ezek. xxxvii. 16, 17). The superiority allotted to Ephraim was not followed by very happy results; it raised an arrogant spirit in that tribe. The delimitation of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh is not easy to follow, particularly in the A.V., which not only does not translate very accurately, but uses some English expressions of uncertain meaning. The R.V. is much more helpful, correcting both classes of defects in its predecessor. Yet even the R.V. sometimes leaves us at a loss. It has been supposed, indeed, that some words have dropped out of the text. Moreover, it has not been found possible to ascertain the position of all the places mentioned. The portion of the land occupied by Ephraim and Manasseh is, however, on the whole, very clearly known, just as their influence on the history of the country is very distinctly marked. In point of fact, the lot of Joseph in Western Palestine was, in many respects, the most desirable of any. It was a fertile and beautiful district. It embraced the valley of Shechem, the first place of Abraham's sojourn, and reckoned by travellers to be one of the most beautiful spots, some say the most beautiful spot, in Palestine. Samaria, at the head of another valley celebrated for its "glorious beauty," and for its "fatness" or fertility (Isa. xxviii. 1), was at no great distance. Tirzah, a symbol of beauty, in the Song of Solomon (vi. 4) was another of its cities, as was also Jezreel, "a lovely position for a capital city." On the other hand, this portion of the country laboured under the disadvantage of not having been well cleared of its original inhabitants. The men of Ephraim did not exert themselves as much as the men of Judah. This is apparent from what is said in ver. 10, and also from Joshua's answer to the request of Ephraim for more land (chap. xvii. 15–18). In the definition of boundaries we have first a notice applicable to Joshua as a whole, then specifications applicable to Ephraim and Manasseh respectively. The southern border is delineated twice with considerable minuteness, and its general course, extending from near the Jordan at Jericho, past Bethel and Luz, and down the pass of Bethhoron to the Mediterranean, is clear enough. The border between Ephraim and Manasseh is not so clear, nor the northern border of Manasseh. It is further to be remarked that, while we have an elaborate statement of boundaries, we have no list of towns in Ephraim and Manasseh such as we have for the tribe of Judah. This gives countenance to the supposition that part of the ancient record has somehow dropped out. We find, however, another statement about towns which is of no small significance. At ver. 9 we find that several cities were appropriated to Ephraim that were situated in the territory of Manasseh. And in like manner several cities were given to Manasseh which were situated in the tribes of Issachar and Asher. Of these last the names are given (chap. xvii. 11). They were Bethshean, Ibleam, Dor, Endor, Taanach, and Megiddo. Some of them were famous in after-history. Bethshean was the city to whose wall the body of Saul and his sons were fixed after the fatal battle of Gilboa; Ibleam was in the neighbourhood of Naboth's vineyard (2 Kings ix. 25, 27); Endor was the place of abode of the woman with a familiar spirit whom Saul went to consult; Taanach was the battlefield of the kings of Canaan whom Barak defeated, and of whom Deborah sang (Judg. v. 19). As for Megiddo, many a battle was fought in its plain. We can only conjecture why these cities, most of which were in Issachar, were given to Manasseh. They were strongholds in the great plain of Esdraelon, where most of the great battles of Canaan were fought. For the defence of the plain it seemed important that these places should be held by a stronger tribe than Issachar. Hence they appear to have been given to Manasseh. But, like Ephraim, Manasseh was not able to hold them at first. Undoubtedly these sons of

Joseph occupied a position which gave them unrivalled opportunities of benefiting their country. But with the exception of the splendid exploit of Gideon, a man of Manasseh, and his little band, we hear of little in the history that redounded to the credit of Joseph's descendants. Nobility of character is not hereditary. Sometimes nature appears to spend all her intellectual and moral wealth on the father and almost to impoverish the sons. And sometimes the sons live on the virtues of their fathers, and cannot be roused to the exertion or the sacrifice needed to continue their work and maintain their reputation. (*W. G. Blaikie, D.D.*)

CHAPTER XVII.

VERS. 1–18. **Zelophehad . . . had no sons, but daughters.**—*The rights of women:*—The question decided by their case was the right of females to inherit property in land when there were no heirs male in the family. We find that the young women themselves had to be champions of their own cause. The decision was, that in such cases the women should inherit, but under the condition that they should not marry out of their own tribe, so that the property should not be transferred to another tribe. In point of fact, the five sisters married their cousins, and thus kept the property in the tribe of Manasseh. The incident is interesting, because it shows a larger regard to the rights of women than was usually conceded at the time. Some have, indeed, found fault with the decision as not going far enough. Why, they have asked, was the right of women to inherit land limited to cases in which there were no men in the family? The decision implied that if there had been one brother he would have got all the land; the sisters would have been entitled to nothing. The answer to this objection is, that had the rights of women been recognised to this extent it would have been too great an advance on the public opinion of the time. The benefit of the enactment was that, when propounded, it met with general approval. Certainly it was a considerable advance on the ordinary practice of the nations. It established the principle that woman was not a mere chattel, an inferior creature, subject to the control of the man, with no rights of her own. But it was far from being the first time when this principle obtained recognition. The wives of the patriarchs—Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel—were neither chattels, nor drudges, nor concubines. They were ladies, exerting the influence and enjoying the respect due to cultivated, companionable women. And though the law of succession did not give the females of the family equal rights with the males, it recognised them in another way. While the eldest son succeeded to the family home and a double portion of the land, he was expected to make some provision for his widowed mother and unmarried sisters. (*Ibid.*) **Manasseh could not drive out the inhabitants of those cities.**—What with "could not" in the one, and "would not" in the other, the enemies of peace and purity were allowed to remain. But why was it, but because of the cowardice and unbelief of "could not"? for no rebellion and opposition of "would not" could hold out against the strength of Israel's sword. It is not so correctly our "cannot" as our "will not" that so many hold a share in our hearts to their annoyance and pollution; for what enemies might not a Christian conquer, what achievements not make, in the spiritual warfare, who goes forth in the strength of the Lord, and in the power of His might? (*W. Seaton.*) *What hinders:*—No, as they were then, and as just then they were going on, they "could not" drive out the Canaanites—that was true enough. 1. Their mood was wrong. They preferred ease to energy. Josephus tells us: "After this the Israelites grew effeminate as to fighting any more against their enemies, but applied themselves to the cultivation of the land, which producing them great plenty and riches, they neglected the regular disposition of their settlement, and indulged themselves in luxury and pleasures. The Benjamites, to whom belonged Jerusalem, permitted its inhabitants to pay tribute; the rest of the tribes, imitating Benjamin, did the same; and, contenting themselves with the tributes which were paid them, permitted the Canaanites to live in peace." In such a mood of course they "could not." 2. Lapped thus in luxury, and thinking more of their own pleasant ease than of their nobler duty, these Israelites had lost practical and prevailing faith in God. And so, of course, letting the weapon of their faith rust in a bad non-use they "could not" drive these Canaanites from their strongholds. 3. Lying thus in

this enervating ease, and losing thus their practical faith in God, the dangers and difficulties in the way of the extirpating these Canaanites were, to their thought, correspondingly increased. The strongholds, to their fearful ease-loving feeling, grew very strong; the fortresses perched upon the rocky hill-tops seemed very unassailable; the chariots of iron—which, drawn by maddened horses and horrible with long, sharp knives, would come dashing upon their ranks—grew awfully terrible. And thus again, of course, "they could not." 4. But think now of these Israelites marshalled and armed for their duty; as ready to obey their God's command; as determined to put Jehovah to the proof, and to go forth relying on His promise. How plain it is that the "could not" would have belonged to the Canaanites, and the "would" would have been the word for these Israelites. Then we had had Scripture of another sort, viz., And the children of Manasseh "would" drive out the inhabitants of those cities, and the Canaanites "could not" dwell in that land. (*W. Hoyt, D.D.*) *Little will, and thus no way*:—I. INABILITY IN ITS RELATION TO UNBELIEF. The promises of God had been many, and the warnings urgent (Exod. xxxiv. 10–17; Num. xxxiii. 50–56, &c.). They who begin by disbelieving God may well fear to encounter powerful enemies. II. INABILITY IN ITS RELATION TO INDISPOSITION. The indisposition that comes—1. Through fear of men. 2. Through love of ease. 3. Through undervaluing the importance of God's command. III. THE INABILITY OF GOD-AIDED MEN PRESENTLY SHOWN TO BE A MERE PRETENCE AND A POOR EXCUSE. 1. The revelation which comes through transgressors themselves. "When the children of Israel were waxen strong, they put the Canaanites to tribute." "Could not" is here seen to be "would not." That "tribute" told the entire story in its true colours. Tribute goes on telling secrets still. The tribute of Judas burned into his very soul, till he threw the thirty pieces on the temple floor, and cried over them in agony. The tribute of the craft by which Demetrius had his wealth let out the secret reason of his great love for the despised Diana (Acts xix. 24–27). The dishonest merchant cannot keep his gains from preaching. Transgressors win their way to success unobserved, and then betray themselves with the very gains they have won. 2. The revelation which comes through those who succeed transgressors. Out of this very section of the tribe of Manasseh arose Gideon, of the family of the Abi-ezrites (ver. 2). On this very ground of the half-tribe of Manasseh was fought the great battle which delivered Israel from the Midianites. And how was it fought? By an army from which more than thirty thousand had been sent to their homes; by a small force of three hundred men, who merely brake their pitchers, and held their torches on high, shedding light on a truth afterwards embodied in one of the famous sayings of Israel, "The battle is the Lord's." It was as though God were purposely reproving the faint-heartedness and idleness of these men who had lived in the days of Joshua. (*F. G. Marchant.*) Why hast thou given me but one lot?—*The complaining of Ephraim*:—A grumbling reference seems to be made here by Ephraim to his brother Manasseh, who had received two lots, one on each side of the Jordan. Alas, how apt is the spirit of discontent still to crop up when we compare our lot with that of others! Were we quite alone, or were there no case for comparison, we might be content enough; it is when we think how much more our brother has than we that we are most liable to murmur. And, bad though murmuring and grieving at the good of our brother may be, it is by no means certain that the evil spirit will stop there. At the very dawn of history we find Cain the murderer of his brother because the one had the favour of God and not the other. What an evil feeling it is that grudges to our brother a larger share of God's blessing; if at the beginning it be not kept under it may carry us on to deeds that may well make us shudder. Joshua dealt very wisely and fearlessly with the complaint of Ephraim, though it was his own tribe. "You say you are a great people—be it so; but if you are a great people, you must be capable of great deeds. Two great undertakings are before you now. There are great woodlands in your lot that have not been cleared—direct your energies to them, and they will afford you more room for settlements. Moreover, the Canaanites are still in possession of a large portion of your lot; up and attack them and drive them out, and you will be furnished with another area for possession." Joshua accepted their estimate of their importance, but gave it a very different practical turn. We have all heard of the dying father who informed his sons that there was a valuable treasure in a certain field, and counselled them to set to work to find it. With great care they turned up every morsel of the soil, but no treasure appeared, till, observing in autumn, what a rich crop covered the field, they came to understand that the fruit of persevering labour was the treasure which their father meant. We have heard,

too, of a physician who was consulted by a rich man suffering cruelly from gout, and asked if he had any cure for it. "Yes," said the doctor, "live on sixpence a day, and work for it." The same principle underlay the counsel of Joshua. Of course it gratifies a certain part of our nature to get a mass of wealth without working for it. But this is not the best part of our nature. Probably in no class has the great object of life been so much lost and the habit of indolence and self-indulgence become so predominant as in that of young men born to the possession of a great fortune and never requiring to turn a hand for anything they desired. After all, the necessity of work is a great blessing. It guards from numberless temptations; it promotes a healthy body and a healthy mind; it increases the zest of life; it promotes cheerfulness and flowing spirits; it makes rest and healthy recreation far sweeter when they come, and it gives us affinity to the great Heavenly Worker, by whom, and through whom, and for whom are all things. This great principle of ordinary life has its place, too, in the spiritual economy. It is not the spiritual invalid, who is for ever feeling his pulse and whom every whiff of wind throws into a fever of alarm, that grows up to the full stature of the Christian; but the man who, like Paul, has his hands and his heart for ever full, and whose every spiritual fibre gains strength and vitality from his desires and labours for the good of others. And it is with Churches as with individuals. An idle Church is a stagnant Church, prone to strife, and to all morbid experiences. A Church that throws itself into the work of faith and labour of love is far more in the way to be spiritually healthy and strong. (*W. G. Blaikie, D.D.*) *Discontentment:*—I. THE EASY WAY TO DISCONTENTMENT. Anybody can complain. Everybody is tempted to complain. Most of those who murmur think that they can show good cause for their complaints. No man is rich enough to be out of the reach of discontent. No man is poor enough to be below the possibility of happiness. II. THE UNFAILING TESTIMONY OF DISCONTENTMENT. 1. Complaints furnish no trustworthy evidence about a man's lot. How can they, when so many murmur in every kind of lot which the world knows? 2. Complaints bear unfailing witness against the murmurer himself. Scripture often condemns the man who complains, apart from considering the cause of complaining. III. THE TRUE ANSWER TO DISCONTENTMENT. 1. Joshua was too wise to dispute the assumption of greatness (vers. 15–17). He who tries to argue a discontented man out of his favourite assumptions does but waste breath. 2. Joshua turned the plea of greatness back on those who used it: "If thou be a great people, then"—work, fight. 3. Joshua sought to cure the murmuring of the heart through the diligence of the hand. The energy which is absorbed in gloomy thoughts, and poured out in bitter complaints, would generally double the small inheritance, if it were rightly directed. Apart from this industry and courage ever tend to happiness. 4. Joshua encouraged these murmurers to think that to the people of God no difficulties were insuperable. He would have them think of the invincible might which had promised to support their faithful efforts (Deut. xx. 1–4), and make them victorious. The after history shows us that a discontented spirit is not easily cured. These people showed the same haughty dissatisfaction again and again after the death of Joshua (Judges viii. 1–3, xii. 1–6). He who has cultivated contentment through faith in God is not readily disturbed; while the man who has learned, in whatsoever state he is, to find some fault with his fellows, has given room in his heart for a demon that is not easily expelled. (*F. G. Marchant.*) *The self-aggrandising spirit:*—They did not use the power which God gave them for the execution of His commands and for driving out the Canaanites, but they misapplied it to their own self-aggrandisement, and to the indulgence of their own covetousness; and they were not content with the lot they had received, although it was the most fruitful part of Palestine; but in a boastful spirit of self-adulation they said, "I am a great people"; they claimed a larger portion for themselves, in order that they might be enriched thereby. Here is an example of that self-idolising and self-aggrandising spirit in nations and in Churches which seek to extend themselves by colonisation and conquest, and even by missionary enterprise, not so much that they may gain kingdoms for Christ, and win subjects to Him, but in order that they may have vassals and tributaries to themselves. Is there not here a solemn warning to such nations as England, which publicly and privately derives an immense revenue from her two hundred millions of subjects in India, and yet has done little hitherto to bring them into subjection to Christ? (*Bp. Chris. Wordsworth.*) *Discontented with our lot:*—When the last national census was taken it would have been an interesting question to have asked just how many people were *where* they wanted

to be. I fear that the really contented souls would have been a very small minority. Contentment with one's spiritual condition is quite too common; and of such low-grade Christians there is not much hope of improvement. But those who are really contented with their present lot, present place of residence, present circumstances or fields of labour, are not in the majority. Take, for example, the ministers of the Gospel and see how many will say: "Well, my place of labour has *peculiar* difficulties; it is a hard field, and I have a great deal to encounter, and if I could get a first-rate call to some better place I would be off in a minute." Very probably you would. But, my good brother, if you will discover any parish on this round globe that has not some "peculiar difficulties" to encounter, then you will have found a people so perfect that they will not need any preaching. Mary Lyon's noble advice to her pupils at Mount Holyoke Seminary was: "When you choose your field of labour for Christ, go where nobody else is willing to go." Heaven is the only place I have ever heard of where there is no hard work or no difficulties. (*T. L. Cuyler.*) *Restless discontent to be avoided*:—My first parish was a very discouraging one, and I was just threatening to play Jonah and leave it when the Lord poured out His Spirit on the little flock and we had a revival that taught me more than six months did in a theological seminary. Many years afterwards I was sorely harassed with doubt whether I should remain in a certain pulpit or go to a very inviting one nearly a thousand miles away. I opened Richard Cecil's "Remains"—a volume of most valuable thought—and my eyes fell on these pithy words: "Taking new steps in life are very serious dangers, especially if there be in our motives any mixture of selfish ambition. 'Wherefore gaddest thou about to change thy way?'" I turned up that text in the book of Jeremiah; it decided me not to gad about or change my field of labour, and I have thanked God for a decision that resulted in my happy thirty years' pastorate in Brooklyn. There are unquestionably times and circumstances in which a minister or any Christian worker should change his place of labour, but never under the promptings of a restless, discontented, or self-seeking spirit. (*Ibid.*) **The Lord hath blessed me hitherto.**—*Retrospect*:—I. A CONFESSION: "The Lord hath blessed me hitherto." I will not at present speak to those of you upon whom the blessing of God has never rested. Remember, that every man is either under the curse or under the blessing. They that are of the works of the law are under the curse. Faith in Him who was made a curse for us is the only way to the blessing. But I speak to as many as have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the Lord saith, "Surely, blessing I will bless thee." You can say at this time, "God hath blessed me hitherto." 1. He has blessed you with those blessings which are common to all the house of Israel. You and I, who are in Christ, are partakers of all covenant blessings in Christ Jesus. "If children, then heirs"; and if we are children of God, then we are heirs of all things. "Ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's," and therefore "all things are yours." Can you not say—"The Lord hath blessed me hitherto"? Has He ever denied you one of the blessings common to the covenanted family? Has He ever told you that you may not pray, or that you may not trust? Has He forbidden you to cast your burden on the Lord? Has He denied to you fellowship with Himself and communion with His dear Son? Has He laid an embargo on any one of the promises? Has He shut you out from any one of the provisions of His love? 2. But then, besides this, Ephraim and Manasseh had special blessings, the peculiar blessing of Joseph, which did not belong to Judah, or Reuben, or Issachar. Each saint may tell his fellow something that he does not know; and in heaven it will be a part of the riches of glory to hold commerce in those specialities which each one has for himself alone. I shall not be you, neither will you be me; neither shall we twain be like another two, or the four of us like any other four, though all of us shall be like our Lord when we shall see Him as He is. I want you each to feel at this hour—"The Lord hath blessed me hitherto." Personally, I often sit me down alone, and say, "Whence is this to me?" I cannot but admire the special goodness of my Lord to me. 3. I think, besides this, that these two tribes which made up the house of Joseph, also meant to say that, not only had God blessed them with the common blessings of Israel, and the special blessing of their tribe, but also with actual blessings. As far as they had gone they had driven out the Canaanites, and taken possession of the country. They had not received all that was promised; but God had blessed them hitherto. Come, we have not driven out all the Canaanites yet, but we have driven out many of them. We are not what we hope to be, but we are not what we used to be. We cannot yet see everything clearly, but we are not blind, as once we were. We have not seen our Lord as He is, but we have seen

Him; and the joy of that sight will never be taken from us. Therefore, before the Lord and His assembled people, we joyfully declare that "The Lord hath blessed us hitherto." Let us expand this confession a little, and speak thus: 1. All the blessings that we have received have come from God. Do not let us trace any blessing to ourselves, or to our fellow-men; for though the minister of God may be as a conduit-pipe to bring us refreshing streams, yet all our fresh springs are in God, and not in men. Say, "The Lord hath blessed me hitherto." 2. And, mark you, there has been a continuity of this blessing. God has not blessed us, and then paused; but He has blessed us "hitherto." One silver thread of blessing extends from the cradle to the grave. There is an unconquerable pertinacity in the love of God: His grace cannot be baffled or turned aside; but His goodness and His mercy follow us all the days of our lives. 3. In addition to that continuity there is a delightful consistency about the Lord's dealings. "The Lord hath blessed us hitherto." No curse has intervened. He has blessed us, and only blessed us. There has been no "yea" and "nay" with Him; no enriching us with spiritual blessings, and then casting us away. He has frowned upon us, truly; but His love has been the same in the frown as in the smile. He has chastened us sorely; but He has never given us over unto death. 4. And, what is more, when my text says, "The Lord hath blessed me hitherto," there is a kind of prophecy in it, for "hitherto" has a window forward as well as backward. You sometimes see a railway carriage or truck, fastened on to what goes before, but there is also a great hook behind. What is that for? Why, to fasten something else behind, and so to lengthen the train. Any one mercy from God is linked on to all the mercy that went before it; but provision is also made for adding future blessing. All the years to come are guaranteed by the ages past. II. THE ARGUMENT: "Forasmuch as the Lord hath blessed me hitherto." 1. This is cause for holy wonder and amazement. Why should the Lord have blessed me? 2. Be full of holy gratitude. Get into the state of that poor man who was so greatly blessed to pious Tauler. He wished the man a good-day. The man replied, "Sir, I never had a bad day." "Oh, but I wish you good weather." Said he, "Sir, it is always good weather. If it rains or if it shines, it is such weather as God pleases, and what pleases God pleases me." Our sorrows lie mainly at the roots of our selfishness, and when our self-hood is dug up, our sorrow to a great extent is gone. Let us, then, utter this text, "Forasmuch as the Lord hath blessed me hitherto," with hearty gratitude for His holy will. Summing up gains and losses, joys and griefs, let us say with Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord." 3. Say also, with holy confidence, "The Lord hath blessed me hitherto." Speak as you find. If any inquire, "What has God been to you?" answer, "He hath blessed me hitherto." The devil whispers, "If thou be the son of God"; and he then insinuates, "God deals very hardly with you. See what you suffer. See how you are left in the dark!" Answer him, "Get thee behind me, Satan, for surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life; and if God takes from me any earthly good, shall I receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall I not receive evil?" He who can stand to this stands on good ground. "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." But he that gets away from this drifts I know not where. 4. Furthermore, if this be true, let us resolve to engage in enlarged enterprises. If the Lord has blessed us hitherto, why should He not bless us in something fresh? (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) **If thou be a great people, then get thee up.**—*Encroachments not permissible:*—Encroachments were not to be made upon their brethren, but new inroads upon their enemies, whom it had become their duty utterly to exterminate. This was the work which Providence had assigned to them, both for the enlargement of the portion, and for the exercise of their piety; and therefore the straitness in which they were placed, intended as it was for an excitement to diligence, fortitude, and faith, was no real crook in the lot. What employs men's hearts and hands for God must be a work with a blessing annexed to it, and always attended with its own reward. In the cultivation of Messiah's kingdom, the assigned inheritance of the Church, and extension of its borders in the world there are many wastes of sin to be taken in, many long-standing thickets of corruption to be hewn and cleared away. The straitened boundaries of Immanuel's land require many spiritual, never-weary labourers in well-doing. How much ought it to be the grief of every pious mind, and the matter of his most anxious concern, in seeing those vast territories yet the possessions of enemies worse than the Perizzites and giants on the borders of Ephraim. Whatever presses on the view to desist from undertakings to which we have the Lord's special

call, or the token of His marked approbation, the considerations of His power and promise are quite sufficient to encourage exertions. In a spiritual view all the Lord's people are a great people, and having great power are destined to mighty enterprises and achievements. In themselves and outward condition, none are more weak and contemptible; yet in their infinitely glorious Lord and Captain they are both great and powerful, so that through grace strengthening them they can do all things, even cut through the greatest obstructions, and conquer the most formidable enemies. Success was to crown action. Neither the axe nor the sword would be employed in vain; the woodland instrument nor the warlike weapon. Reward, though but in promise, sweetens labour, and the hope of triumph emboldens to conflict; but how much more the assurance of both! The Christian has no less encouragement in all the enterprises assigned him; for whether in works of faith, in labours of love, or in the toils of conflict, this is the invigorating address: "Be not weary in well-doing, for in due season ye shall reap if ye faint not." They had only to work and the way would open; to fight, and the enemy would yield to the sword, as the thicket to the axe. The possession was theirs, and needed only to be claimed. Who would not thus have his coast enlarged? for the inheritance that improves, and widens beneath its owner's own hand and eye has far more charms, and yields higher satisfaction than the seat of ease obtained by others. Heaven will be but the sweeter, the more welcome and valued, after the labours of this mortal life, and its conquests close in eternal triumphs. (*W. Seaton.*) *Labour the price of excellence*:—This is the voice of God's providence to every soul that has dreamed of greatness, or of the possession of unfolded powers and abilities. By labour show your talent. Express what you are by what you do. Michael Angelo once exhibited a rare specimen of his art, and it was pronounced beautiful and wonderful. Months passed, and visitors saw nothing more in his studio, and when he was asked what he had been doing Angelo answered that he had been at work on the same statue, reducing this feature and developing that; and his visitors said those were but trifles, and he should be engaged on something great. To this he replied, "Trifles make perfection, and perfection itself is no trifle." That was a noble answer. Indeed, genius may be defined as that power which best magnifies trifles. It sees the worth of everything. It glorifies the small because of their relation to the great. The most finished actor of our age, on retiring from his profession, and on receiving a public testimonial as having made the best impression on his age in reference to his art, made the memorable remark, "Whatever is excellent in art must spring from labour and endurance." That sentiment may well be written on the shield of every aspiring young man. Greatness is from culture, rather than from genius; and if it had a voice for the world, it would sing of "The high endeavours and the glad success." There are unquestionably some instances of that original intensity of a mental faculty by which the mind springs, as it were, at a leap, to the results it desires; but it is certain that many of the most remarkable men have attributed to patient labour what the world have attributed, in them, to endowment. That Newton attributed his success to greater patience with the minute is well known, and Sir Joshua Reynolds held that superiority resulted from intense and constant application of the strength of intellect to a specific purpose. "Genius," he said, "is the art of making repeated efforts." The first effort he made with his pencil was the perspective of a book-case from sheer idleness; but his father saw it, encouraged him, and he went on by labour to success. Benjamin West, when he drew the babe's face as he watched it in the cradle, was kissed by his mother for the effort, and was wont to say, "That kiss made me a painter." And to every department of artistic, mechanical, and professional life the advice of Sir Joshua Reynolds to his scholars is adapted, where he said, "Make no dependence on your own genius. If you have great talents, labour will improve them; if you have poor talents, labour will increase them. Nothing is denied to well-directed labour. Nothing is to be obtained without it." Napoleon well said, when once asked to create a marshal out of a man who belonged to a noble family, but who had no other claim, "It is not I that make marshals, but victory." What we attribute to some gift may be traced to the kindling and concentrating power of feeling or passion, as is illustrated in the many instances where the greatest mental effort has sprung from passion. Scorched and stung by a Scottish reviewer, Byron wrote a poem, and he who was deemed but a simple rhymester became a poet, as he himself once said, "I went to bed one night, and woke up to find myself famous." So in sharp debates, in violent controversy, the most remarkable things have been uttered; men have gone beyond themselves and have astonished the world. A

mighty intensity of thought has burned within them, and they have brought the whole stock of intellectual attainment to bear upon the matter before them. The best things of many men in all departments of effort have been unpremeditated; but this gives no argument against labour, study, and forecast, because these men have been made capable of these great or uncommon efforts by the wealth of mind stored up. The ripe things of nature fall into hands prepared to receive them; and in a profound sense may the wise man's words be applied beyond religion, where he says, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him." Genius, therefore, is really intensity of thought, feeling, emotion, activity. All the faculties of the man are in earnest. The whole man is glorified by the intensity of the determined spirit, and what is done is done with every energy—with a resoluteness that means with persistence of effort to conquer if such a thing can be. Take up any man's life who has risen to real, permanent eminence, and you see there the marks of labour; so that it may be said of many, as was said of Piso, "What he withdrew of application he deducted from glory." Goethe said truly, "What is genius but the faculty of seeing and turning to advantage everything that strikes us?" And so thought the celebrated French landscape painter, Poussin, who, when asked how he was able to give such an effect to his paintings, simply answered, "I have neglected nothing." The price of excellence, then, is labour. What most we need is to intensify our love of God and His gospel—to make faith more a fire—a fire that rouses up to action every inmate of the house, and shows what wonders can be wrought. A fire that demands more and more fuel, when it is rightly confined to its place, and that bids us go out of our Mount Ephraim, into the land of the giants, and cut wood. (*Henry Bacon.*) *The responsibility of greatness*:—1. It is not a brave and wholesome thing to be too eager for favours and for help from others. There are men of this class in every community. They want to rise in the world, but they would rise on the exertions and sacrifices of others—not their own. We find the same in spiritual life. There are those who sigh for holiness and beauty of character, but they are not willing to pay the price. They would make prayer a substitute for effort, for struggle, for the crucifying of self. They want a larger spiritual inheritance, but they have no thought of taking it in primeval forests which their own hands must cut down. The truth is, however, that God gives us our inheritance just as He gave Joseph's lot to him. Our promised land has to be won, every inch of it. You must train your own faith. You must cultivate your own heart-life. You must learn patience, gentleness, and all the lessons of love yourself. No one can give you any Christian grace. 2. True friendship ofttimes declines to do for men what they can do for themselves. If you can wake up a young man, arouse his sleeping or undiscovered powers, so that he will win a fortune with his own hands and brain, that is an infinitely better thing to do for him than if you were to give him a fortune as a present. In the former case, in getting his fortune, he has gotten also trained powers, energy, strength, self-reliance, disciplined character and all the elements that belong to strong manhood. In the other case he gets nothing but the money. A little poem tells the story of two friends. One brought a crystal goblet full of water which he had dipped from flowing streams on far-off mountain heights. The hills were his, and his the bright, sweet water. But the water did not refresh his friend. The other looked upon him kindly, saw his need, and gave him—nothing. With a face severe he bade him seek his own hard quarry, hew out the way for the imprisoned waters, and find drink for himself. He obeyed, and the water gave him satisfaction. That is God's way with us. He does not make life easy for us. Surely it is a wiser love that puts new strength into your heart and arm, so that you can go on with your hard duty, your heavy responsibility, your weight of care, without fainting, than would be the love which should take all the load away and leave you free from any burden. 3. True greatness should show itself, not in demanding favours or privileges, but in achieving great things. The way a commander honours the best regiment on the field of battle is, not by assigning it to some easy post, to some duty away from danger. He honours it by giving it the most perilous post, the duty requiring the most splendid courage. So it is in all life—the place of honour is always the hardest place, where the most delicate and difficult duty must be done, where the heaviest burden of responsibility must be borne. It is never a real honour to be given an easy place. Instead of demanding a place of honour as a favour of friendship, which sets no seal of real greatness upon our brow, we should win our place of honour by worthy deeds and services. The truth is far-reaching in its applications. It should sweep

out of our thought for ever all feeling that others owe us favours; all that spirit which shows itself in self-seeking, in claims for place or precedence over others. The law of love is that with whatsoever we have we must serve our fellow-men. The most highly dowered life that this world ever saw was that of Jesus Christ. Yet He demanded no recognition of men. He claimed no rank. He never said His lowly place was too small, too narrow, for the exercise of His great abilities. He used His greatness in doing good, in blessing the world. He was the greatest among men, and He was the servant of all. This is the true mission of greatness. There is no other true and worthy way of using whatever gifts God has bestowed upon us. Instead of claiming place, distinction, rank, position, and attention, because of our gifts, abilities, wisdom, or name, we must use all we have to bless the world and honour God. (*J. R. Millar, D.D.*) *The proof of greatness*:—Petty jealousies are harder to deal with than anything else. Joshua had not only to conquer but also to divide the country. It was divided into several parts. Jealousy was aroused. Some said, You have not considered my greatness as you did that of Ephraim. In the present day a worker for God has need to pray for tact to deal with others. Our text is very suggestive, and may be applied in many ways. Prove thy greatness by clearing the forest. Pretension proved by achievement; thus prove thy strength by thy actions. 1. If great, why not clear the forest? Great power demands corresponding enterprise! Some financially are great; if so, let your contributions be beyond others who are not in such a position. If possessed of a superior education, prove it by your exertions to benefit others. Some are great in position as standard-bearers in God's army; prove it by your faith; show what faith will do; go up and clear the forest by your zeal and consecration—the more advantages we claim the more obligations we contract. 2. If cramped for room, why not clear the ground you have? Some are always asking for more scope, from the village to the town, from the town to the city, forgetting that in their own sphere they have not done all they could do. When this is done God will open up a larger sphere. Do thoroughly all that in which you are engaged. The man who looks after the ones and twos God will bless with other larger spheres for usefulness. Greatness does not lie in pretensions but in actions. (*A. G. Brown.*) *Cure for complaining*:—This, then, is the cure for our complainings—the memory of the Lord's promises of help; and then the brave going forth against the causes of the complainings, and thus the curing of them. 1. Apply this cure for complainings to the winning of culture. How often we complain, "in our circumstances, with our limitations, with our business, &c., no chance for culture." And we settle to the newspaper or fill up the chance moments with a hurried reading of the last novel—not the last best; too often the last worst. But the cure for such complainings is, with God's help, to go forth and seize culture. Take up the Chautauqua scheme for reading, for example. Take it up, go through with it, put the energy into doing your work and not into complaining, and you will grow in culture surprisingly. 2. Apply this cure for complainings to the maintaining a consistent Christian profession. Think of the saints in Cæsar's household. By God's help determine to be a saint, whatever your circumstances. 3. Apply this cure for complainings to the duty of becoming Christian. What Canaanites and Perrizzites of objections men are apt to make—*e.g.*, do not understand whole Bible; it is a hard thing to serve God; it is gloomy to be Christian; I am afraid God will not receive me; so many hypocrites among professing Christians; I don't know that I am one of the elect; I have not time; I am not fit; I will meet a good deal of opposition; I don't feel; I am afraid if I do become a Christian I will not hold out; I cannot believe; I am willing to be a secret Christian, &c., illimitably. But stop complainingly conjuring such objections. Go forth in the promised help of Christ to Christ, any way. So at once get cure for your complainings and surely find the forgiveness and peace of Christ. (*W. Hoyt, D.D.*) **Thou shalt drive out the Canaanites.**—*Driving out the Canaanites and their iron chariots*:—I. WE MUST DRIVE THEM OUT. Every sin has to be slaughtered. Not a single sin is to be tolerated. 1. They must all be driven out, for every sin is our enemy. Any pretence of friendship with iniquity is mischievous. 2. Sin is our Lord's most cruel enemy. Saved by Jesus, will you not hate sin as He did? Would any person here lay up in his drawer as a treasure the knife with which his father was murdered? Our sins were the daggers that slew the Saviour. Can we bear to think of them? 3. Remember, also, that a man cannot be free from sin if he is the servant of even one sin. Here is a man who has a long chain on his leg—a chain of fifty links. Now, suppose that I come in as a liberator, and take away

forty-nine links, but still leave the iron fastened to the pillar, and his leg in the one link which is within the iron ring, what benefit have I brought him? How much good have I done? The man is still a captive. II. THEY CAN BE DRIVEN OUT. I do not say that we can drive them out, but I say that they can be driven out. It will be a great miracle, but let us believe in it; for other great wonders have been wrought. 1. Note first that you and I have been raised from the dead. Is it not so? "You hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." If a dead man has been raised, then anything can be done with the man who is now made alive. 2. You have also by Divine power been led to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as the result of Divine grace within your heart, what is there that you cannot do? If you have been enabled to believe, you can be enabled to be holy. He that led you to exert faith, can lead you, by faith, to overcome any and every iniquity. 3. You have already conquered many sins. He that has helped you so far can surely help you even to the conclusion of the fight. Do not doubt that the almighty power of Divine grace, which has achieved so much, can achieve yet more. Be strong and very courageous, for the Lord of hosts Himself is at your side. 4. Have you not seen other Christians conquer? Oh, let your memory charge you now with brethren and sisters in whom you saw great infirmities and sins at the commencement of their spiritual career; but how they have grown! How they have vanquished inbred sin! What God has done for them He can do for you. III. THEY SHALL BE DRIVEN OUT. 1. This is what Christ died for, to save His people, not from some of their sins, but from all their sins. 2. This is what Christ lives for. Christ in heaven is the pattern of what we shall be, and He will not fail to mould us after His own model. We shall one day be perfectly conformed to His image, and then we shall be with Him in glory. Our Lord's honour is bound up with the presentation of all His saints in spotless purity to Himself in the day of His glorious marriage. 3. This is what the Holy Spirit is given for. He is not given to come into our hearts, and comfort us in our sins, but to deliver us from all evil, and to comfort us in Christ Jesus. He quickens, He directs, He helps, He illuminates; He does a thousand things; but, chiefly, He sanctifies us. He comes into the heart to drive out every other power that seeks to have dominion there. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *All sins to be conquered*:—They must all be conquered, every one. Not one single sin must be allowed to occupy the love of our heart and the throne of our nature. There are certain sins that, when we begin to war with them, we very soon overcome. These Israelites, when they were up in the mountains, and in the woods, soon got at the hill-country Canaanites and destroyed them; but down in the plain, where was plenty of room for horses and chariots, the Israelites were puzzled what to do; for some of these Canaanites had chariots of iron, which had scythes fixed to the axles, and when they drove into the ranks of an army, they mowed down the people as a reaping machine cuts down the standing corn. For a while this seems to have staggered the Israelites altogether; it was a terrible business to think about, and fear exaggerated the power of the dreadful chariots. Dread made them powerless, till they plucked up courage, and when they once plucked up courage, they found that these chariots were not nearly so terrible as they were supposed to be. There were ways of managing and mastering them, if Israel would but trust in God, and play the man. When a man is converted by Divine grace, certain sins are readily overcome: they fly away home at once, never to return. Swearing is a kind of Canaanite that is soon settled off—driven out and slain. So it is with many other forms of evil. We get our sword at their throats quickly, and by God's grace we are clean rid of all temptation to return to them. Such sins, though once powerful, are left dead on the field of battle. I know that some of you could bear testimony that your favoured sins became so disgusting to you that you have never had a temptation to wander in that direction; and if a desire towards them has crossed your mind, you have revolted against it, and cast it away from you with indignation. But certain other sins are much tougher to deal with. They mean fight, and some of them seem to have as many lives as a cat. There is no killing them. When you think that you have slain them, they are up and at you again. They may be said to have chariots of iron. 1. These sins are sometimes those which have gained their power—their chariots of iron—through long habit. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" No, he never shall, but the grace of God can work the change. 2. Some sins get their chariots of iron from being congenial to our constitution. Certain brethren and sisters are sadly quick-tempered; and as long as ever they live, they will have to be on their guard against

growing suddenly angry, and speaking unadvisedly with their lips. They are quick and sensitive, and this might not in itself be a serious evil; but when sin wields that quickness and sensitiveness, evil comes of it. How many a sincere child of God has had to go for years groaning, as with broken bones, because of the quickness of his temper! As for these constitutional sins, you must not excuse them. Everything that is of nature—ay, and of your fallen nature when it is at its best—has to be put under the feet of Christ, that grace may reign over every form of evil. 3. Frequently the chariot of iron derives its force from the fact that a certain sin comes rushing upon you on a sudden, and so takes you at a disadvantage. Yet we must not say, because of this, "I cannot help it," for we ought to be all the more watchful, and live all the nearer to God in prayer. 4. Sometimes these sins get power from the fact that, if we do not yield to them, we may incur ridicule on account of them. I would not, if I could, prevent any of you from being persecuted in your measure. Should not soldiers fight? I would stay the persecution for the sake of the persecutor; but for the sake of you who have to bear it, I would hardly lift a finger to screen you, because the trial is an education of the utmost value. 5. Perhaps one of the things that is worst of all to a Christian is, that certain sins are supposed to be irresistible. It is a popular error, and a very pernicious one. (*Ibid.*)

CHAPTER XVIII.

VERS. 1–28. The whole congregation . . . assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle.—*Religion in the new land*:—An event of great importance now occurs; the civil arrangements of the country are in a measure provided for, and it is time to set in order the ecclesiastical establishment. First, a place has to be found as the centre of the religious life; next, the tabernacle has to be erected at that place—and this is to be done in the presence of all the congregation. It is well that a godly man like Joshua is at the head of the nation: a less earnest servant of God might have left this great work unheeded. How often, in the emigrations of men, drawn far from their native land in search of a new home, have arrangements for Divine service been forgotten! In such cases the degeneracy into rough manners, uncouth ways of life, perhaps into profanity, debauchery, and lawlessness, has usually been awfully rapid. On the other hand, when the rule of the old puritan has been followed, "Wherever I have a house, there God shall have an altar"; when the modest spire of the wooden church in the prairie indicates that regard has been had to the gospel precept—"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you"—a touch of heaven is imparted to the rude and primitive settlement; we may believe that the spirit of Christ is not unknown; the angels of virtue and piety are surely hovering round it. The narrative is very brief, and no reason is given why Shiloh was selected as the religious centre of the nation. We should have thought that the preference would have been given to Shechem, a few miles north, in the neighbourhood of Ebal and Gerizim, which had already been consecrated in a sense to God. That Shiloh had been chosen by Divine direction we can hardly doubt, although there may have been reasons of various kinds that commended it to Joshua. Situated about half-way between Bethel and Shechem, in the tribe of Ephraim, it was close to the centre of the country, and, moreover, not difficult of access for the eastern tribes. Here, then, assembled the whole congregation of the children of Israel, to set up the tabernacle, probably with some such rites as David performed when it was transferred from the house of Obed-Edom to Mount Zion. Hitherto it had remained at Gilgal, the headquarters and depôt of the nation. The "whole congregation" that now assembled does not necessarily mean the whole community, but only selected representatives, not only of the part that had been engaged in warfare, but also of the rest of the nation. (*W. G. Blaikie, D.D.*) **How long are ye slack to go to possess the land?**—*Joshua's remonstrance*:—I. Is NOT THE GOODLY PORTION FREELY PROVIDED, AND WAITING YOUR ACCEPTANCE? Hath not the Lord God of your fathers freely given you a title to the country of peace and rest in heaven? May not "an entrance be ministered unto you abundantly"? &c. His hand broke asunder your chains, when ye lay helpless in the land of your spiritual bondage—when Satan was your taskmaster, sin your service, and death

your wages. He paid the full ransom of your deliverance. The same hand which took you forth from the captivity and death of sin has still led you onward, cheered with increasing hope of reposing in the kingdom and glory of Jesus Christ. As your day, so has your strength been. Is there then, in the little circle of perishing enjoyments around you, is there, even among the present spiritual privileges with which Divine love has invested you, anything sufficiently great to satisfy the aspirations of one who looks for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life? II. IS NOT THE ATTAINMENT OF SALVATION THE GREAT BUSINESS OF LIFE, TO WHICH YE SHOULD BE DEVOTED? Your life, in its best and only worthy acceptation, consists not in seeking "what ye shall eat, and what ye shall drink, and wherewithal ye shall be clothed," and how ye shall enjoy the present, and be aggrandised for the future; but in holy resolve and aim to seek the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. Be your portion of present advantages, whether temporal or spiritual, what it may, let it not absorb your minds, that ye may rest upon it, and seek nothing beyond. Do not live so much beneath your privileges as to be satisfied with the mere shadow of good; while the pure, perfect, unsatiating, and everlasting reality solicits you in vain. III. HAVE YE NOT LOST TIME ENOUGH ALREADY? If we look inward to the experience of our own hearts—if we recollect the testimony of years past and gone, they will surely speak of long and guilty inattention to the duty of serving God who hath called us to His kingdom and glory. How many opportunities have ye possessed of walking with God, like Enoch, and of illustrating the holy character of His religion so unequivocally, that men must have taken knowledge of you that you had been with Jesus! What then remains? Redeem the time by an increasing zeal and diligence to do the work of God, and to attain by His grace a meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light. (*R. P. Buddicom, M.A.*) *Slack to possess*:—The weakness of our nature discovers itself, even under the most prosperous and encouraging circumstances. This degrades our conquests and diminishes the glory of our triumphs. Either self-indulgence, indolence, or indifference was the cause why they were slack to go to possess the land. The luxury of new and undisturbed possessions succeeding to the incessant toils and privations of warfare too long, and it may be too immoderately, entwined about their earthly affections, and retained them in the lap of indulgence. A condition like this, so congenial with the fleshly desires of the heart, induced a frame of indolence which was not only indisposed but might render them indifferent to new achievements. How unfavourable to those energies and exertions which require the mortification of self-indulgence as a condition of uninterrupted prosperity! This has often been found attended with more dangerous results than even the most pressing adversity. Who has not needed this reproof again and again? "Why are ye slack to go to possess the land?" Present gratifications have made us indifferent to future interests; and private satisfactions to public duties. Let the Christian remember that he owes much to the interests of others, not only to the present, but even to future generations, as far as concerns the Church of God; and therefore, to live to himself, inclosed within the narrow limits of his own person and concerns, is unworthy the greatness of his character, and far beneath the dignity of his being. Though nothing were wanting to render complete our personal estate or family patrimony, yet let us remember that we have much to achieve for others, for our brethren, and the cause of truth, that require self-denying and self-sacrificing exertions. (*W. Seaton.*)

CHAPTER XIX.

VERS. 1–51. The part of the children of Judah was too much for them: therefore the children of Simeon had their inheritance within the inheritance of them. —*A too extensive earthly portion*:—A fine lesson for such who, in the amplitude of their earthly portion, have more than themselves or their families in conscience require, when numbers of their brethren, high-born as themselves and heirs to the noblest hopes, have many of them not only a scanty lot, but scarcely the common necessaries of life. If the one has too little, surely it may be said, though few are likely to allow it, the other has too much. And why this disparity in the condition of the brethren but for the trial of faith in the one and the display of charity in

the other? What an admonition in so impoverished a world as this, where so many, comparatively speaking, yea, and in cases not a few, literally are houseless and helpless, without means of daily sustenance, to contract their own borders that room may be given to these destitute Simeonites. The first Christians did this to an extent not now required: so powerfully did the love of Christ operate in their hearts, and so little hold had earthly things of their affections when placed in competition with spiritual and heavenly interests, that the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul—and in this too, in practice as well as in sentiment (Acts iv. 34, 35). Without reducing to one common stock, that distribution which should be alike to all, a state of things evidently adapted only to times of persecution, and that under no other circumstances could answer the designs of Providence in a condition of trial common to this life, who is there that thinks he has too much, and is so affected with the little which others have of the same household of faith, that he is cheerfully ready to allow a part in his portion? therein discovering that amiable feature of the Christian character which the apostle has marked as strikingly beautiful, "willing to distribute." (*W. Seaton.*) **An inheritance to Joshua.**—*The leader disinterested:*—As in a shipwreck the captain is the last to leave the doomed vessel, so here the leader of the nation was the last to receive a portion. With rare self-denial he waited till every one else was provided for. Here we have a glimpse of his noble spirit. That there would be much grumbling over the division of the country he no doubt counted inevitable, and that the people would be disposed to come with their complaints to him followed as a matter of course. See how he circumvents them! Whoever might be disposed to go to him complaining of his lot knew the ready answer he would get—"You are not worse off than I am, for as yet I have got none!" Joshua was content to see the fairest inheritance disposed of to others, while as yet none had been allotted to him. He might have asked for an inheritance in the fertile and beautiful vale of Shechem, consecrated by one of the earliest promises to Abraham, near to Jacob's well and his ancestor Joseph's tomb, or under shadow of the two mountains, Ebal and Gerizim, where so solemn a transaction had taken place after his people entered the land. He asks for nothing of the kind, but for a spot on one of the highland hills of Ephraim, a place so obscure that no trace of it remains. It is described in Judges ii. 9 as "Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, on the north of the mountain of Gaash." The north side of the mountain does not indicate a spot remarkable either for amenity or fertility. In the days of Jerome his friend Paula is said to have expressed surprise that the distributer of the whole country reserved so wild and mountainous a district for himself. His choice of it was a splendid rebuke to the grumbling of his tribe, to the pride and selfishness of the "great people" who would not be content with a single lot, and wished an additional one to be assigned to them. "Up with you to the mountain," was Joshua's spirited reply; "cut down the wood, and drive out the Canaanites!" In any case, he set a splendid example of disinterested humility. How nobly contrasted with men like Napoleon, who used his influence so greedily for the enrichment and aggrandisement of every member of his family! Joshua came very near to the spirit of our blessed Lord. (*W. G. Blaikie, D.D.*) *Self the last to be considered:*—The servant, though honourable above all, and worthy a double portion, was as the last and least among them, and gave rest to others before he took rest himself. In this he was a striking type of that adorable Redeemer, the captain of the host of the Lord, who, till He had obtained full conquest and possession for His people, sat not down at the right hand of God, in the presence of His triumphant Church. Though Lord of all, yet He became the servant of all, and as an example ever to be studied and copied by His followers, said in expressive condescension and abasement, "Am not I among you as one that serveth?" Oh! that this mind were more evidently in us which was in Christ Jesus, who, in all He sacrificed, suffered, and forewent, ever looked on the things of others, and in His self-emptyings placed His own felicity and glory in the salvation of His people. The lot assigned Joshua was his choice, and within the portion of his own tribe. There was nothing of pre-eminence to distinguish it from the possession of others, except as himself gave note to it, and being the residence of one so exalted in character, so great in achievements. It does not appear the best of the land, yet it possessed one advantage, beyond what it could have had in fertility and extent, being near to Shiloh, the habitation of holiness and seat of mercy. Lot chose Sodom for the pleasantness and fertility of its plain, but Joshua chose Timnath-serah for the

holiness of its vicinity. How few in the settlements of life, whose means afford the advantage of choice, are determined by considerations of piety and the hope of rendering service to God and His people! Generally a residence is sought which promises gratifications most congenial with their earthly wishes, or where they may receive the greatest good to themselves, and not where they may do the greatest good to others. (*W. Seaton, M.A.*)

CHAPTER XX.

VERS. 1-9. **Cities of refuge.**—*The cities of refuge:*—1. The first thought that naturally occurs to us when we read of these cities concerns the sanctity of human life; or, if we take the material symbol, the preciousness of human blood. God wished to impress on His people that to put an end to a man's life under any circumstances was a serious thing. Man was something higher than the beasts that perish. It is not a very pleasing feature of the Hebrew economy that this regard to the sanctity of human life was limited to members of the Hebrew nation. All outside the Hebrew circle were treated as little better than the beasts that perish. For Canaanites there was nothing but indiscriminate slaughter. Even in the times of King David we find a barbarity in the treatment of enemies that seems to shut out all the sense of brotherhood, and to smother all claim to compassion. We have here a point in which even the Hebrew race were still far behind. They had not come under the influence of that blessed Teacher who taught us to love our enemies. 2. Even as apportioned to the Hebrew people, there was still an uncivilised element in the arrangements connected with these cities of refuge. This lay in the practice of making the go-el, or nearest of kin, the avenger of blood. Had the law been perfect, it would have simply handed over the killer to the magistrate, whose duty would have been calmly to investigate the case, and either punish or acquit, according as he should find that the man had committed a crime or had caused a misfortune. It was characteristic of the Hebrew legislation that it adapted itself to the condition of things which it found, and not to an ideal perfection which the people were not capable of at once realising. In the office of the go-el there was much that was of wholesome tendency. The feeling was deeply rooted in the Hebrew mind that the nearest of kin was the guardian of his brother's life, and for this reason he was bound to avenge his death; and instead of crossing this feeling, or seeking wholly to uproot it, the object of Moses was to place it under salutary checks, which should prevent it from inflicting gross injustice where no crime had really been committed. 3. The course to be followed by the involuntary manslayer was very minutely prescribed. He was to hurry with all speed to the nearest city of refuge, and stand at the entering of the gate till the elders assembled, and then to declare his cause in their ears. If he failed to establish his innocence, he got no protection; but if he made out his case he was free from the avenger of blood, so long as he remained within the city or its precincts. If, however, he wandered out, he was at the mercy of the avenger. Further, he was to remain in the city till the death of the high priest, it being probable that by that time all keen feeling in reference to this deed would have subsided, and no one would then think that justice had been defrauded when a man with blood on his hands was allowed to go at large. 4. As it was, the involuntary manslayer had thus to undergo a considerable penalty. Having to reside in the city of refuge, he could no longer cultivate his farm or follow his ordinary avocations; he must have found the means of living in some new employment as best he could. His friendships, his whole associations in life, were changed; perhaps he was even separated from his family. To us all this appears a harder line than justice would have prescribed. But, on the one hand, it was a necessary testimony to the strong, though somewhat unreasonable, feeling respecting the awfulness, through whatever cause, of shedding innocent blood. Then, on the other hand, the fact that the involuntary destruction of life was sure, even at the best, to be followed by such consequences, was fitted to make men very careful. In turning an incident like this to account, as bearing on our modern life, we are led to think how much harm we are liable to do to others without intending harm, and how deeply we ought to be affected by this consideration when we discover what we have really done. And where is the man—parent,

teacher, pastor, or friend—that does not become conscious, at some time or other, of having influenced for harm those committed to his care? We taught them, perhaps, to despise some good man whose true worth we have afterwards been led to see. We repressed their zeal when we thought it misdirected, with a force which chilled their enthusiasm and carnalised their hearts. We failed to stimulate them to decision for Christ, and allowed the golden opportunity to pass which might have settled their relation to God all the rest of their life. The great realities of the spiritual life were not brought home to them with the earnestness, the fidelity, the affection that was fitting. "Who can understand his errors?" Who among us but, as he turns some new corner in the path of life, as he reaches some new view-point, as he sees a new flash from heaven reflected on the past—who among us but feels profoundly that all his life has been marred by unsuspected flaws, and almost wishes that he had never been born? Is there no city of refuge for us to fly to, and to escape the condemnation of our hearts? It is here that the blessed Lord presents Himself to us in a most blessed light. "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And let us learn a lesson of charity. Let us learn to be very considerate of mischief done by others either unintentionally or in ignorance. What more inexcusable than the excitement of parents over their children or of masters over their servants when, most undesignedly and not through sheer carelessness, an article of some value is broken or damaged? Let them have their city of refuge for undesigned offences, and never again pursue them or fall on them in the excited spirit of the avenger of blood! So also with regard to opinions. Many who differ from us in religious opinion differ through ignorance. They have inherited their opinions from their parents or their other ancestors. If you are not called to provide for them a city of refuge, cover them at least with the mantle of charity. Believe that their intentions are better than their acts. (*W. G. Blaikie, D.D.*) *The cities of refuge*:—I. THE RIGHT TO LIFE. Alone among the nations stood Israel in the value set upon human life. Its sacred book enjoined its worth. Philosophically, such a sacred value upon life would be expected of the people of God. The value of life increases in ratio with the belief in God and immortality. Deny immortality and you have prepared the ground for suicide. They who say, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," may voluntarily end the life before to-morrow comes. Greece with all her learning was far behind. Aristotle and Plato both advised putting to death the young and sickly among children. Plutarch records having seen many youths whipped to death at the foot of the altar of Diana. Seneca advised the drowning of disabled children—a course that Cicero commended. Heathenism gives but a dark history. It is one of the last lessons learned that each human life is its own master. No one can take it away except for a transcendent reason. II. THE SURRENDER OF LIFE TO WHAT IS GREATER. It is a larger condition to be good than to live wrongly. Better surrender life than do wrong. On the other hand, better be murdered than be a murderer. Better suffer wrong than do wrong. Whether in this late century the removal of capital punishment would increase crime we cannot verify; but the old law of the avenger is not yet stricken from the statutes of civilisation. No refuge in God's sight for the hating heart. No palliation of deliberate human deeds of wickedness. No city of refuge for a murderer. III. THE MOTIVE MARKS THE CHARACTER. It is not the mere deed that reveals the man. Nor is it the catastrophe that marks the deed. Every one's motive is greater than all he does. The man who hates his brother is a murderer as truly as he who kills. Not always what one does, but what he would do, is the standard of his character. Take away every outside restraint; leave one alone with himself; and his unhindered wish and motive mark just what he is. The intentional taking away of life makes murder; the unintentional relieves from all crime. Crime, therefore, does not find its way from the hand, but from the heart. Thus does God look on the heart. IV. THE DIVINE FORBEARANCE WITH HUMAN BLUNDERINGS. This is what the city of refuge expressly declares. The stain of the deed of shedding blood rests in the fact that the life was made in the Divine likeness. The greatness of the life was evident in its kinship with God. Death by accident does not take away the terrible sorrow that settles like a pall. The careless taker away of life may go insane in his despair; but the awful agony of the blunderer does not make the loss any the less heavy. It will call out pity even for the careless one; but it will not counterbalance the loss. V. THE CONDITIONS OF REFUGE. Each unfortunate held the keeping of his life in his own hands. The provided city did not alone save the

delinquent from the avenger. Mansions in it were provided for all who should enter by right. Handicraft was taught those who found shelter within its walls. Food and raiment were furnished by kind hands outside the gates in addition to what they themselves should gather or earn for themselves. They had much provided; but the conditions they must themselves fulfil. It was not enough to rest within sight of the city; they must enter in. They must not venture forth; only as they remained could they be safe. We have no cities of refuge now; but God is our refuge. He is the hope of the careless who turn to Him. The conditions we cannot disregard. He gives the opportunities, of which we must take advantage for ourselves. We cannot set aside His condition. VI. THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR LIFE IN THE CHOICES WE MAKE. In a certain sense the safety of each unfortunate rested solely upon himself. It was no time for theories; it was the time for action; and on that action depended his own life. He held his temporal safety in his own care and keeping. In thousands of ways we are thus making choices that will shape our life and conduct in all future time. We have the power to save ourselves or to destroy. Peter had the opportunity to save his Lord even when he denied Him. Judas could have shielded his Master instead of betraying Him. Each one of us can choose whom to serve. The choice of evil made Peter weep, and made Judas become a suicide. We cannot choose evil and live. If we choose God for our refuge, we shall not die. He is our city. It rests with us to choose what we shall be. (*David O. Mears.*) *Blood-guiltiness removed from the Lord's host; or, the cities of refuge:*—I. A BENEFICENT POLITICAL INSTITUTION. In ancient Greece and Rome there were asylums and shrines where the supposed sanctity of the place sheltered the blood-stained fugitive from righteous retribution; and it is probable that here, as in innumerable other instances, the pagan institution was but an imitation of the Divine. In our own country, too, there were, in former times, similar sanctuaries. But how different the copy from the pattern—the one institution how pernicious, the other how salutary! By the so-called sanctuaries all that was unsanctified was promoted, for here wilful murderers were received, who, after a short period, were permitted to go forth to repeat a like violence with a like impunity. Not thus was it with him who fled to the city of refuge. We have heard of Indian savages who, when one of their people is killed by a hostile tribe, will go out and kill the first member of that tribe whom they may meet. We have heard, too, of those who for years would cherish vindictiveness and deadly hate against some enemy. Quite opposite to any such spirit of retaliation is that which was to stimulate the Goel in his pursuit. The express command of God placed a sword in his hand which he dared not sheathe. As one entrusted with a prisoner of war, so was it, as it were, said to him, "Thy life for his if thou let him go." II. A TYPE OF CHRIST. Each person concerned, each regulation for the direction of the various parties, each circumstance of the case finds its counterpart in the gospel antitype. 1. To begin with the unfortunate homicide himself—he represents the sinner in his guilt and danger, under the wrath of God. 2. Does any one doubt the efficacy of God's way of saving sinners? Would any one fain flee to other refuges? Ah, they are but refuges of lies. 3. Money could procure no remission; nor will riches avail "in the day of the Lord's wrath." 4. Mercy could not be shown unless the prescribed conditions were observed. 5. Up, then, and flee, thou yet unsaved one! Wait not vainly till others bear thee thither perforce. Complain not of thy God as an austere judge because He saith, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die"; but bless Him for His clemency in preparing thee a place of safety. 6. This terrible Goel—the avenger of blood—whose fatal purpose no reward, no argument, no entreaty can turn aside, is but an impersonation of the righteous anger of the Lord against the sinner. 7. That we may more fully perceive the appositeness of the illustration which the cities of refuge furnish of the person and work of the Redeemer, let us notice their position in the country—"in the midst," not in the borders, or in the corners of the land (Deut. xix. 2). 8. The very names of the six cities are, to say the least, in keeping with the symbolism of the subject. 9. The cities of refuge were not open to native Israelites only, but "the stranger" and "the sojourner"—in fact, "every one" among them was accepted (Num. xxxv. 15). Thus none is accounted an alien who, owning himself a sinner, flies to Christ. 10. There is a beautiful lesson in the fact that not only the city itself, but the very suburbs, afforded safety. 11. The isolation, the restrictions, and the privations experienced by him who was confined within the city of refuge may be compared to the separation of the Christian from the world and the things of the world; but what, after all, are temporary trials, if the precious life be

spared? 12. We have spoken of the danger of delay in seeking the refuge. Let us earnestly bear in mind the danger of the opposite kind, namely, of afterwards quitting the safe retreat. 13. At the death of the high priest the manslayer was set free. 14. Before the homicide could be received as a permanent inmate of the city of refuge, a trial was appointed. If he was acquitted, he was admitted there; but if condemned as a designing murderer, he was given up to the avenger for summary execution. This condemnation may be read in two ways. It suggests— 1. A blessed contrast. We have been tried, and found guilty. Our sins are of crimson dye. Yet the door of mercy stands still open; nay, more, it is the full admission of our guilt, and not the profession of our innocence, that is the condition of our entrance thereat. 2. A solemn comparison. Though it be so, that for all sin there is a pardon, yet the Scripture speaks of "a sin that is unto death." The case of a deliberate murderer, in contradistinction to an unwitting manslayer, illustrates that of one whose sins are not the sins of ignorance, but presumptuous sins, namely, who has deliberately and persistently sinned against light and knowledge. From this depth of wickedness, for which no city of refuge is provided, and for which there is no forgiveness, either in this world or the next, the Lord graciously preserve us! (*G. W. Butler, M.A.*) *The cities of refuge:*—I. THE APPOINTMENT AND USE OF THESE CITIES. It is very often said by thoughtless and ignorant persons that the laws of the Old Testament were barbarous and cruel. To this two answers might be made: First, that they were a great advance upon any other legislation at the period when they were given, and were full of wise sanitary provisions, and of tender care for human life and welfare; secondly, that the objection urged does not lie against Moses, but against the human race at that stage of its history. We are apt to forget that the laws of Moses were adaptations to an existing and very low order of society, and were designed to be a great training-school, leading children up into manhood. The cities of refuge were a merciful provision in times of lawless vengeance, and the entire legislation in regard to them was founded on an existing and very imperfect condition of society, while it looked towards a perfect state, towards the heavenly Jerusalem. II. THE REASONS FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF THESE CITIES. 1. All men at that early day recognised the right to kill an assassin; all exercised the right, or refrained from doing so, at their will; but Jehovah gave a positive command to Israel, without alternative. It should be blood for blood; and it certainly rests with the opposers of capital punishment to-day to show when and how this original law was abrogated. How it should be carried out was a matter of secondary consequence; that it should be observed was the first thing. When the law was given, the blood-avenger did what we to-day remand to courts of law. It was a step, surely, beyond an utterly lawless vengeance to appoint one person to carry out the Divine will that life should be forfeited for life. 2. But while this was the general rule, it was not a merciless and blind one; for the law distinguished between voluntary and unintentional homicide. It judged an act by its motives, and thus lifted the whole question of punishment out of the sphere of personal revenge and family spite. Here at the very threshold of civilisation how clearly man is treated as a free moral agent, responsible for his acts, and yet judged by his motives! The materialism of to-day, which endeavours to sweep away this primitive morality, has human nature against it. 3. Then, in a system intended to train a nation into habits of self-restraint and righteousness, it was necessary very early to bring in the lessons of mercy. God had always declared Himself the real avenger of blood. "I will require man's blood," He said, when He gave the law for the death of a murderer; "vengeance is Mine: I will repay." The unintentional act was not to be treated like that of malice aforethought. The accidental homicide had certain rights; and yet the mercy offered him was conditional. It was only a chance. It was not left as a small thing for a human life to be taken, even unintentionally: hence the limitations placed about the right of asylum in the cities of refuge. 4. But this was not all: the law demanded an expiation for the wrong, even when it was done without intent. Still it was a wrong; blood had been shed, and the Divine government never grants forgiveness without atonement. God cannot be tender and forgiving without at the same time showing His holiness and just claims upon the guilty. This principle found expression in a singular way in the cities of refuge, in the provision that, whenever the high priest died, the prisoners of hope should go freely back to their homes. The priest was in some sort a sacrifice for the sins of the people, even in his natural death. Here we find what we might call a constructive expiation. Thus from age to age death was

associated in the public mind with deliverance from punishment, the death of successive high priests setting forth the death of Christ on the Cross. III. THE CITIES OF REFUGE ARE A TYPE OF CHRIST. Their very names have a typical meaning—Kedesh, "holy"; Shechem, "shoulder"; Hebron, "fellowship"; Bezer, "refuge"; Ramoth, "high"; and Golan, "joy." (*Sermons by the Monday Club.*) *Christ our city of refuge:*—I. There is an analogy BETWEEN OUR SITUATION AND THE SITUATION OF THOSE FOR WHOM THE CITY OF REFUGE WAS DESIGNED. It was not intended for the murderer. The law respecting him was that he should immediately be put to death, however palliating might be the circumstances connected with his crime, and however sacred the place to which he might flee for protection. Even the law respecting the manslayer bore in some points a resemblance to that which referred to the murderer. While provision was made for his safety if he chose to avail himself of it, it was also enjoined that should he be overtaken by the avenger of blood his life was to be the forfeit of his negligence. He had shed the blood of a fellow-man; and should he disregard the means of safety which were furnished to him, no guilt would be incurred, although by him whom he had injured his blood also should be shed. Now, all of us are chargeable with having transgressed the law of God. In one important respect, indeed, the comparison between us and the manslayer does not hold. He deprived his fellow of life without having meditated the deed, and therefore he did not contract moral guilt; for although the motive does not in every case sanctify the deed, it is to the motive that we must look in determining the virtuous or vicious nature of an action. We, however, have sinned against the Divine law voluntarily. We have done it in spite of knowledge, conviction, and obligation. Involved, then, as we are, in this universal charge of guilt, the justice of God is in pursuit of us, and is crying aloud for vengeance. And the condition of those whom it overtakes is utterly hopeless: death is the forfeit which they must pay. Let us guard against the callousness of those who, though they readily enough admit that they are sinners, seem to imagine that no danger is to be apprehended, and soothe themselves with the vague expectation that, since God is good, they shall somehow or other drop into heaven at last, and be taken beyond the reach of all that is painful. Oh! is it not infatuation thus to remain listless and secure, when God's anger is provoked, and equity demands the execution of the threatening? Would it have been folly in the manslayer to have deluded himself into the notion of his safety, at the very time that his infuriated enemy was in hot pursuit? and is it wise in the sinner, when Divine justice is about to seize him, to remain insensible to the hazard of his situation? But let us not despair. Our sin, it is true, has veiled Jehovah's face in darkness; but through that darkness a bright beam has broken forth, revealing to us peace and reconciliation. II. There is an analogy BETWEEN OUR PROSPECTS AND THE PROSPECTS OF THE MANSLAYER UNDER THE LAW. By Joshua six cities of refuge were appointed, three on either side of Jordan, that the distance might not be too great which the manslayer required to travel. Now, in Christ Jesus we have a city of refuge to which we are encouraged to repair for protection from the justice which is in pursuit of us. This refuge God Himself has provided; so that He whom we have injured has also devised and revealed to us the method by which our salvation may be effected. "Deliver," He said, "from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom." Nor is this divinely-provided deliverance difficult of being reached. Christ is ever near to the sinner, and no tiresome pilgrimage requires to be performed before He can be found. All obstructions have been removed out of the way which leads to His Cross, and everything has been done to facilitate our flight to its blessed shelter. *The cities of refuge:*—I. The persons for whom the cities of refuge were provided were in CIRCUMSTANCES OF IMMINENT DANGER. 1. The danger of man arises from sin and transgression against the authority of that law which God revealed for the personal rule and obedience of man, it being an essential arrangement in the Divine government that the infraction of the law should expose to the infliction of punishment. 2. The peril of man which thus arises from sin affects and involves his soul, which is pursued by justice as the avenger, and is exposed to the infliction of a future state of torment, the nature and intensity of which it is beyond the possibility of any finite mind to conceive, and the duration of which is restricted by no limits, but is coeval with eternity itself. 3. The peril of man thus arising from transgression and affecting and involving his soul applies not to a small portion, but extends to every individual of the species. II. The persons for whom these cities of refuge were provided were furnished with AMPLE DIRECTIONS AND FACILITIES TO REACH THEM. 1. The clearness with which the offices of the Lord Jesus Christ, in

their adaptation to the condition of man, are revealed. 2. The nature of the method by which in their saving application and benefit the Saviour's offices are to be applied. III. The persons for whom cities of refuge were provided became on reaching them ASSURED OF INVIOLABLE SECURITY. 1. The grounds of this security; it arises from sources which render it unassailable and perfect. There is the faithfulness of the promise of the Father, which God has repeatedly addressed to His people; there is the efficacy of the mediation of the Son; and there is the pledge of the influences of the Holy Spirit. 2. The blessings involved in this security. And here we have not so much a comparison as a contrast. He who fled for refuge, after he had become a homicide, to the appointed asylum in the cities of Israel, became by necessity the subject of much privation. He was secure, but that was all, inasmuch, it is evident, that he was deprived of home, of kindred, of freedom, and of all those tender and endearing associations which are entwined around the heart of the exile, and the memory of which causes him to pine away, and oftentimes to die. But in obtaining, by the mediation and work of Christ, security from the perils of the wrath to come, we find that the scene of our security is the scene of privilege, of liberty, and of joy. IV. If the persons for whom the cities of refuge were provided removed or were found away from them they were JUSTLY LEFT TO PERISH. There is a Saviour, but only one; an atonement, but only one; a way to heaven, but only one; and when once we have admitted the great fact with regard to the reason of the Saviour's incarnation and sacrifice on the Cross and His ascension into heaven, we are by necessity brought to the conclusion and shut up to the confirmed belief of this truth, that "neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name," &c. (*James Parsons.*) *Cities of refuge*:—I. NOTICE A FEW POINTS IN WHICH THERE IS NO CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN THESE CITIES PROVIDED FOR THE MANSLAYER AND THE PROTECTION WHICH THE GOSPEL PROVIDES FOR THE SINNER. 1. The cities of refuge afforded only a temporary protection for the body. The gospel, on the contrary, is a protection for the whole man, and for the whole man for ever. 2. The cities afforded protection only to the unfortunate, whereas the refuge of the gospel is for the guilty. 3. The protection which the cities afforded involved the sacrificing of certain privileges; that of the gospel ensures every privilege. 4. Those who enjoyed the protection of the cities would desire to return to their former scenes; not so with those who enjoy the protection of the gospel. II. NOTICE SOME OF THE MORE ILLUSTRATIVE FEATURES OF RESEMBLANCE. 1. The cities of refuge were of Divine appointment; so is the protection offered in the gospel. 2. The cities of refuge were provisions against imminent danger; so is the gospel. 3. The cities of refuge were arranged so as to be available for all the manslayers in the country; so is the gospel provided for all sinners. (1) Capacity enough to secure all. (2) Within reach of all. (3) Pointed out to all. 4. The cities of refuge were the exclusive asylums for such cases; so is the gospel the only way of salvation. 5. The cities of refuge were only serviceable to those who by suitable effort reached them. (1) Individual effort. (2) Immediate effort. (3) Strenuous effort. (4) Persevering effort. (*Homilist.*) *The cities of refuge*:—I. Let us, then, look at THE PEOPLE WHO DWELT IN THEM. Who were they? They were not exclusively rich people, nor were they exclusively poor. Poverty or wealth was no title to a residence there. Nor were they even educated people, or illiterate people. Some other plea than these must be urged in order to get an entrance there. They were guilty people. Upon their hands must be the mark of their foul sin. They must be avowed man-slayers, or else the gates were closed against them, and admission refused. I think I hear the Pharisee reply something like this: "I am a religious man—a respectable man. This is a religious city established by God, kept by His priests—the peculiar care of Jehovah. There is a certain fitness between that city and myself. I mean to enter there, because I think it is a good thing to dwell in such a place." But they speak to him and say, "Sir, you have made a mistake. Let us ask you one question—Have you ever done any harm?" He looks at them, amazed at the question. "Done any harm? No, sirs, mine has been a blameless life. Taken the life of another? Why, I would not hurt a fly." "Then, sir," they say to him, "this city cannot be your dwelling-place. It, with all its privileges, is for the man-slayer." Ah, sinner, now I know why you are not saved. You are not guilty: you do not believe it. But let me point out to you another mark of these people who dwelt in the cities. They were something more than guilty: they were conscious of their danger. They had found out that they had slain a man. They knew the penalty of the law: they believed it. They did not dare to doubt it, and they fled for their very lives. Sinner, would to God that we could get you to flee for your life! Oh,

sinner, to-night you see it not, but there behind you is the keen, two-edged sword of that law that you have broken—that law that you have defied. It is very near to you. God says, "Fly, fly for thy life to the city of refuge." And you—what are you doing? Why, you do not even hear the voice of God. You have no consciousness of your danger. One other word about these people: they were responsible, absolutely responsible, for their own safety. I think I see that man again. We have watched him, and we have spoken to him; he left us and ran; but we say to each other now, "What is the matter? Our friend has stopped running. Look! He is sitting down by the road-side, and from that wallet behind his back, which we did not see before, he has taken out some bread. He is eating it leisurely, quietly. He must have made a mistake. Surely, the avenger of blood cannot be after him. Surely he cannot be guilty." We go up to him and we say, "Friend, you told us just now that you were flying from the avenger of blood. How is it that you are taking your ease?" "Well," he says, "the fact is I have been thinking over the matter, and I have changed my mind. Quite true, I have done wrong; quite true, I have taken a life; quite true, the avenger of blood is after me. But look here, sir. The logic of the matter is this: if I am to be saved I shall be saved." "What folly! You may be saved if you flee; but, as God liveth, unless you get within its walls you never will be saved." II. LOOK TO SOME REMARKABLE POINTS ABOUT THE CITIES OF REFUGE THEMSELVES. Well, the point that strikes us, and which shows forth Jesus Christ and His willingness and power to save, is this: these cities were all easy of access. God took all the difficulties out of the way. 1. They were all upon the level plain. If you read chapter xx., and take the map, as I have done, and look at the land, you will be struck with this, that not one of them was built upon a mountain. What does it mean? Why, it means that an anxious and fleeing man—fleeing for his life—must have no weary mountain to travel up. There, upon the level plain, is the city whose welcome walls invite him for refuge. You have no hill of experience or of works or deeds to climb up. And then observe another fact about them, proving the ease of access which God had arranged for them. 2. If you were to look at the land of Palestine you would observe that it is divided nearly longitudinally—that is, from north to south—by a river at times broad and wide and deep, and with a mighty current—the river Jordan, Now, we will suppose that God had put the cities of refuge, we will say, on the other side. Here comes a poor man-slayer; he is flying for his life, and he reaches Jordan. There is no bridge; he has no boat; he cannot swim; and yet there within sight of him is the welcome city. "Oh," he says in his bitter despair, "God's promise has brought me so far only to mock me." But no, God arranges otherwise. God said, "Let there be six cities, three on each side of the river; one north, one in the middle, one in the south, on one side; one in the south, one in the middle, one on the north on the other side." What does it mean? Why, it means this, that wherever there could be a poor, guilty man-slayer there was a city of refuge. Oh, "The Word is nigh thee," &c. 3. May I add, too, that the gates were always open. Eighteen hundred years have the gates been open. Man's infidelity and opposition have never closed the gates. 4. Observe, too, about these cities, that they were all well known. That was of the very greatest importance. God ordained that there should be six. Their names were given. I think the mothers of Israel must have taught their little children those six names by heart. It would never do that by and by their child should be in danger, and know not where to escape. We are told by Josephus that where cross-roads met there were always finger-posts established, having these words, "To the city of refuge." And I often think that persons like myself, or even the most distinguished ministers of Christ, cannot save a soul, but they may be finger-posts pointing clearly to Jesus, and saying in life and ministry and deed, "To the city of refuge." Let me point out to you another fact of great importance about these cities—the most important fact of all, without which all other facts would be useless. Within these walls was perfect safety. God had said it: Jehovah's word was staked to it. Perfect safety. God's honour was at stake. Every man who fled inside that city should be saved. (*J. T. Barnardo.*) *Refuge:*—Life is full of alleviations, shelters, ways of deliverance. So that however gloomy things look at times, the worst never comes to the worst. At the moment when all seems lost the gate of the city of refuge opens before us, and friendly hands are held out to draw us within its sanctuary. I. I want to give some illustrations of this, and, first of all, FROM WHAT WE MAY CALL THE ORDINARY ARRANGEMENTS OF THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD —the means of refuge which this God-made world provides within itself against the

commoner ills. The daily round seems so trivial, our cares are so petty, the things that we are working for so utterly unworthy of beings laying any claim to greatness, that we should be tempted to forego our claim and settle down in mechanical acceptance of the humdrum and the commonplace if we did not avail ourselves of means of escape into a higher realm of thought and feeling. To some of us the culture of music affords a city of refuge from the drearier side of life. The transformation of Scott's "wandering harper, scorned and poor," under the potent spell of his own music is repeated a thousand times a day.

"In varying cadence, soft or strong,
He swept the sounding chords along:
The present scene, the future lot,
His toils, his wants were all forgot.
Cold diffidence and age's frost,
In the full tide of song were lost."

Others find their city in the contemplation of great pictures. A man, crusted over with the sordidness of his daily task, will get away into a picture gallery. He will sit down tired and uninterested before some great masterpiece, and after a while it will begin to take hold of him. As he sits there, passively yielding to its influence, just letting it lay itself against his spirit, there will gradually steal over him a great restfulness and calm. Presently a deeper life will wake up. He will pass from the passive to the active state. Imagination will become alive; thought will stir; a new world will grow into realness around him—a larger, higher, finer world, not less real, but more real; not foreign to him, but more truly native to him than the world whose dust he has just shaken from his feet. And a greater number, perhaps, find their way of escape by the door of good books than by either music or pictures, or both together. And it is more than a merely temporary refuge. If books are really great, if the art is really elevating, we get something more than a short respite from an unfriendly world. When we go back to it the world is changed. The avenger of blood is no longer there. But there are tenser forms of evil to be saved from than the dull pain of a prosaic and uninspiring existence. There are sharp strokes of misfortune, the sudden loss of health, an overwhelming catastrophe in business, or bereavement. It is marvellous how at such a time people find themselves ringed round with friends. The story of Naomi is the story of the destitute in every age. What could have been more hopeless than the outlook for her? Yet she got through. She found friends among the foreigners; and when after the long years of exile she returned to Bethlehem, she found herself taken to people's hearts. And Ruth the Moabitess was befriended also. There are many who could say with old John Brown of Haddington, "There might be put upon my coffin, 'Here lies one of the cares of Providence, who early wanted both father and mother, and yet never missed them!'" So true is this that of late years we have begun to hear in tones of complaint and foreboding of "the survival of the unfit." The world, it seems, is too kind. There is too much providence. That complaint need not distress us. But it is a confirmation of the Christian view of the world under God's fatherly administration from a somewhat unexpected quarter; and it is none the less valuable for the source from which it comes. God is love, and He will be yet more fully known in the world's palaces of science as a refuge. But we cannot think long on the subject without being sorrowfully conscious that there are other foes of the soul against which the ordinary providence of God offers no defence; and our sorrow is only turned into joy when we recognise that in these cases a still better refuge is provided. "God Himself is our refuge, a very present help in time of trouble." 1. For example, there is sin. It is possible for men to go through life without any distinct perception of sin as an enemy of their happiness. But whenever the conscience is truly awakened, from that moment sin stands forth as the saddest fact in life. It is the one foe that peace cannot dwell with. Other evils we may escape, leaving them still in possession of the outer suburbs, while we retreat into the inner citadel of the soul. But not with sin. For the awfulness of that is that its very seat is in our inmost soul, so that the more deeply we live the more vivid is the fatal consciousness of its presence. And whether you count the burning shame of it, the self-contempt it breeds, the vague but awful terrors which of necessity dwell with it, or the feeling of helplessness which grows upon us as we realise how impossible it is to escape unaided from its power, as soon as its burden presses upon a man it is felt as the heaviest burden of

life, different, not only in degree but in kind, from every other, intolerable, and yet never to be shaken off by any human strength. Here is an avenger for which earth provides no city of refuge. Great books, great pictures give no relief now; they aggravate. Mother Nature with her healing ministries has no balm for this wound. Thank God there is deliverance. The troubled conscience comes to peace in Jesus Christ. 2. Another case in which God alone in His own person can be a refuge for us, is when we are oppressed by the sense of finiteness that comes to us some time or other in our experience of all things earthly. There are times when we seem to see round everything. We have reached the limit of our friends' capacity to satisfy us; music is nothing more to us than a combination, more or less faulty, of sounds that jar upon the nerves. "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity and vexation of spirit." And all human goodness is as the morning cloud. "All men are liars," you say in your haste. And if not that, then at least, "I have seen an end of all perfection." Blessed is the man who in that hour knows the way to God. The secret of the Lord is with him, and the water that he drinks of shall be in him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life. 3. Death and deliverance. And then there is death. There are those who through fear of death are all their life-time subject to bondage. Well, God delivers us from that spectre. When we walk through the valley of that shadow, we fear no evil for He is with us. We who have fled for refuge to the hope set before us find ourselves holding by an anchor that enters into that within the veil. II. NOW, IT WILL BE A GREAT HELP TO US IF WE RECOGNISE IN EVERY LIGHTENING OF THE BURDENS OF LIFE THE SIGN THAT GOD HAS BEEN GOING BEFORE US PREPARING DELIVERANCE. Do not let us shut God out of the alleviations that spring up out of the earth as we pass along. There were six cities of refuge appointed for the Hebrews, and now one and now another of these cities would offer a practicable way of escape from the avenger. And God fulfils Himself in many ways. The doors of hope that seem entirely earth-fashioned and of human provision are equally of God's appointment with that heavenly door by which alone we can find deliverance from the deeper sorrows. Your God-given way of escape is not always along the path of extreme religious fervour. A week of rest at the seaside will do you more spiritual good sometimes than a week of revival services. A hearty shake of the hand from a genial unbeliever will give you a mightier lift than a lecture from a saint. And you are to use the means of escape that lies nearest you, and is most suitable—and see God's gracious provision in it whatever it is that gives you effectual relief. I don't mean that all ministries are of the same order, or intrinsically of equal worth. But then all troubles are not of the same order either. Paul is equally the minister of God when to the gaoler crying, "What must I do to be saved?" he says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved"; and to the sailors worn out with long battling with the storm, he recommends, not prayer, but to take food. III. Let me DIRECT YOUR MINDS TO A DUTY WHICH GOD LAID UPON THE ISRAELITES IN RELATION TO THEIR CITIES OF REFUGE. "Thou shalt prepare thee a way and divide the coasts of thy land, which the Lord thy God giveth thee to inherit, into three parts, that every slayer may flee thither." That is, there shall not only be a city of refuge, but there shall be a road to it. And these roads were to be kept in order. And it came afterwards to be a law that finger-posts should be placed wherever other roads crossed the road to the city of refuge, so that a man in search of it might the more easily find his way. Now the meaning of this in the larger bearing which we are giving it all, is that we should make ourselves familiar beforehand with the means of access to the doors of deliverance which God has provided. We are bidden to have resources. We must know the use of pictures and of great books; we must know the way to Nature's treasure-house, or be able, like Boethius, to solace ourselves amid the disorders of the world by contemplating the Divine order of the stars. In the day of comparative prosperity we are to prepare for adversity. And this is a counsel of tremendous significance when we think of the supreme needs of the soul, those needs which nothing short of God can meet. "Thou shalt prepare thee a way." One of the most pathetic stories in the Old Testament is that which relates how King Saul, who had gone his own time-serving, politician-like way all his life, came at last in his extremity to feel his need of God, and did not know how to come to Him. "Acquaint thyself with Him." "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth"—in the springtime of life, when all is bright and hope-inspiring. Now is the time to make a path for yourself to Him. (*C. S. Pedley, M.A.*) *The Christian's cities of refuge*:—I. OUR FIRST CITY OF REFUGE IS PRAYER. Whatever trouble comes to us, we can run to prayer for help, as the man of old ran to the city of refuge. II. OUR SECOND CITY OF REFUGE IS THE BIBLE.

When Jesus was tempted three times by the devil in the wilderness to do wrong, every time His heart ran to the Bible as a city of refuge and quoted some precious promise. III. A THIRD CITY OF REFUGE IS SACRED SONG. If our hearts and voices are full of sweet and pure songs about God, and heaven, and doing good, they will keep away a great many wicked thoughts and evil words. IV. THE FOURTH CITY OF REFUGE IS TRUST IN GOD AS OUR FATHER. A child was asked the question, "What is faith?" She answered, "God has spoken, and I believe it." That is a part of what it means to trust in God. V. OUR FIFTH CITY OF REFUGE IS THE HOLY SPIRIT AS OUR GUIDE. VI. THE SIXTH CITY OF REFUGE, THE LAST ONE AND THE MOST PRECIOUS, IS JESUS AS OUR SAVIOUR. (*Christian Age.*) *The number of the cities of refuge* :—These were doubtless sufficient to answer the exigencies that might arise; but why six were appointed, and not seven, the perfect number, we may conceive was the reference they all had to one other, the only perfection of types, the Lord Jesus, and in whom alone security can be found. The perfection of the covenant and of every covenant blessing is found in Him. In whatever trouble, whether in first convictions or after-trials, the Christian, as the prophet, with thoughts raised to Christ, may exclaim, "O Lord, my strength and my fortress, and my refuge in the day of affliction." (*W. Seaton.*) *The situation of the cities of refuge* :—In the division of land east and west of Jordan which was nearly equal the Lord made equal provision for both, that it might be no disadvantage on which side soever any dwelt who were within the extent of the inheritance. Christ is for general benefit, wherever men live, within the sound of His gospel; so that it matters not where that is, in what part or quarter of the world. How great a mercy to be stationed near this refuge! and how great a sin to neglect or despise its security! (*Ibid.*) *The cities of refuge illustrative of Christ's redeeming work* :—How illustrative of the way of life, the facilities grace has given to sensible and alarmed sinners to flee from the wrath to come! I. In the gospel of Christ is found nothing to impede or discourage an immediate application for salvation, BUT THE WAY IS SET BEFORE MEN UNDER DIRECTIONS SO PLAIN AND OBVIOUS THAT HARDLY ANY ONE CAN ERR, EXCEPT THROUGH WILFUL IGNORANCE AND DETERMINED REBELLION. Faithful ministers are designed to answer the end of directing-posts; they are to stand in byways and corners, to distinguish the right way from the wrong, and thereby, if possible, to prevent any from proceeding to their own destruction. Mercy has placed them on the road to life purposely to remind sinners of their danger, to direct the perplexed, and to admonish the careless. How important is simplicity in a matter that involves in it the concerns of life and death! What if the line of inscription, "To the City of Refuge," had been in any other language than the one generally understood? and what if gospel ministers express themselves in a way that few only can reap the benefit of their instructions? They ruin more than they save, and cannot avoid a fearful charge in the day when every work will be brought into judgment. II. Next, consider THE REQUIREMENTS MADE OF THE MAN WHO HAD OCCASION TO AVAIL HIMSELF OF THE PROVISION APPOINTED; and as if having witnessed the act of slaughter, follow him to the gates of the city. His first and obvious duty, and that to which necessity compelled, was to leave the dead and run for his life, to rise from his bleeding neighbour and betake himself, with all possible haste, to the nearest refuge. This was to be voluntary, for no one could compel him. Another requirement was that he who had set out should make all possible haste till he had got within the walls of the city; for security was not in the way, but at the end; not while escaping, but when refuged. And what shall be said of them who, professing to flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them in Christ, think neither of danger nor security, but are taken up, as their chief concern, with the pleasure and pursuits of the world? III. THE INTERNAL CONSTITUTION OF THESE CITIES, like the way to them, and the requisitions made of those for whose benefit they were instituted, INSTRUCTS US IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF MANY EVANGELICAL TRUTHS. Let us enter for examination, or rather consider ourselves as needing the security they give. Refuge was not allowed till after judicial investigation. They were no asylum for murderers, but for those guilty of manslaughter only. In this the legal refuge came short of that the gospel sets before us: it was wisely and necessarily so; for no typical institutions could be ordained contrary to public justice and security, or that would have perpetually endangered the life and peace of society. Herein the pre-eminence of the gospel appears, and the infinite merit of Christ's blood, which has efficacy to atone for the worst of crimes. The government under which these cities were placed must not be forgotten; they were given to the Levites, and though distinct from those they were to inhabit, yet they were numbered among them. This denoted an appointment of mercy, namely, that all the privi-

leges peculiar to them, the security, residence, and provision there afforded, were all the fruit of priestly merits, and under the regulation of sacerdotal dominion. The streams of mercy from Christ flow to sinners through the prevalence of His atoning sacrifice and the exercise of His availing intercession. Again, safety was nowhere but within the city—not only was the manslayer required to flee to it, but to remain there the life of the high priest. Expressive appointment! Who out of Christ can be safe? One cannot but remark the deficiency of the type, as to the liberty as well as security which every believer obtains through Christ. As long as the high priest lived the slayer of blood was deprived of liberty beyond the bounds of the city. With all the mercy there provided, it must have been no little inconvenience to have been compelled so suddenly to give up connections, occupations, inheritance, and family for so uncertain a period. Nevertheless we are left to admire the wisdom of the Divine procedure, in that regard to the ends of public justice and social right, ever observed in even those institutions which were principally designed to set forth the unbounded grace of Christ. While the life of the high priest typified the security of Christ, the death of the high priest was to express the redemption of the forfeited possession. "After the death of the high priest, the slayer shall return to the land of his possession." His life was a blessing that protected the slayer from the avenger, but his death unmistakably greater, for that secured liberty with life. The death of Christ has not only availed to deliver us from all the penalties of a broken covenant, but to interest us in all the positive blessings of the new; not only to save from all the sorrows of guilt, but to restore to us all the joys of innocence. (*Ibid.*)

CHAPTER XXI.

VERS. 1-45. **Unto the Levites . . . these cities.**—*Ministers liberally treated:*—The liberality both of God and of His people to the ministers of God is here very marvellous, in giving forty-eight cities to this one tribe of Levi, which was the least of all the tribes, yet have they the most cities given to them (vers. 4, 10, 41), because it was the Lord's pleasure to have this tribe provided for in an honourable manner, seeing He Himself took upon Him to be their portion and made choice of them for His peculiar service; therefore did He deal thus bountifully with His ministers, partly to put honour upon those whom He foresaw many would be prone to despise, and partly that by this liberality they, being freed from worldly distractions, might more entirely devote themselves to God's service and to the instruction of souls. (*C. Ness.*) *Ministers wisely located:*—God provided for the residence of His ministers in most ample extent and number, and in a way suited to the spiritual instruction and benefit of the nation. In temple service they were round about the habitation of His holiness; and yet, in their ministerial instructions, dispersed over the whole land. How exact a fulfilment of dying Jacob's prediction, and that even though mercy changed the curse into a blessing: "I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel." What an important appointment! and how adapted to the communication and diffusion of Divine truth for their lips, as the messengers of the Lord of hosts, were to keep knowledge, and at their mouth the people were to seek the law! It is no common privilege, under the more exalted and distinguished dispensation of the gospel, that the ministers of salvation are not removed into a corner, but that as servants of the most high God they have their stations assigned them, as may best promote the increase and instruction of the Church. These are the stars which He holds in His right hand, and which, great in wisdom and power, He numbers and calls by their names. What holy and heavenly light and influence are they ordained to impart in their several spheres! Without them the Christian Church would soon be involved in the most degrading and destructive ignorance, and overwhelmed with the miseries of corruption and error. Who that admits the importance of their services would not yield room to them as being equally a privilege as a duty. Their residence is to be esteemed a mercy, and no intrusion. Thus it has appeared that the Lord has ever paid special regard to His ministers, and as here enjoined upon His people, in obligation the most reasonable, to provide them habitations as well as support. (*W. Seaton.*) **There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken.**—*Divine faithfulness:*—I. THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD IN ACCOMPLISHING HIS ENGAGEMENTS

TOWARD THE TRIBES OF ISRAEL. II. THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD TO HIS CHURCH COLLECTIVELY in subsequent engagements. III. THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD IN HIS ENGAGEMENTS TO INDIVIDUAL BELIEVERS. I believe there is no person experiencing the power of religion who has not had an increasing evidence of the faithfulness of God in verifying His promises on which He has caused him to hope. He has found—notwithstanding the dark appearances of Divine providence—he has found that sort of satisfaction which he was taught to expect from the exercise of faith and confidence in Jesus Christ and obedience to Him. He has found, in seasons of pain and difficulty, that kind of assistance on which he was taught to rely. The faithfulness of God in performing His promises at present must, however, be in a great degree obscured by the darkness of our present state; for everything is in perpetual motion. No one can understand the nature of a beautiful building in the rubbish, or, while it is actually rising, in the midst of the complicated instruments used in its erection, but we must wait till it is finished before we can form a just estimate of its beauty. And with respect to that great hope of which the possession of Canaan was but a shadow and figure—the possession of the heavenly inheritance—in a very short time every real believer will be able to put his seal to the truth of the Divine promise. Let us rejoice that we have a covenant of God, and a covenant ordered in all things and sure, which is all our salvation and all our desire. And first, by way of improvement, let us observe the propriety of remembering the way in which the Lord God hath led us. If we consider the trials and sorrows of the present life as a part of that holy dispensation, in that proportion shall we be disposed to glorify God. If we trace the hand of man in these events, this may produce disquietude; but if we could extend our view to the furthest limit, all this would frequently be matter of gratitude, and we should be enabled to give thanks to God in everything. Let us look forward to that state in which we shall have His kindness fully displayed. (*R. Hall, M.A.*) *The triumphant record of God's faithfulness:*—Verses 43–45 are the trophy reared on the battlefield, like the lion of Marathon, which the Greeks set on its sacred soil. But the only name inscribed on this monument is Jehovah's. Other memorials of victories have borne the pompous titles of commanders who arrogated the glory to themselves; but the Bible knows of only one conqueror, and that is God. "The help that is done on earth, He doeth it all Himself." The military genius and heroic constancy of Joshua, the eagerness for perilous honour that flamed, undimmed by age, in Caleb, the daring and strong arms of many a humbler private in the ranks, have their due recognition and reward; but when the history that tells of these comes to sum up the whole, and to put the "philosophy" of the conquest into a sentence, it has only one name to speak as cause of Israel's victory. That is the true point of view from which to look at the history of the world and of the Church in the world. The difference between the "miraculous" conquest of Canaan and the "ordinary" facts of history is not that God did the one and men do the other; both are equally, though in different methods, His acts. In the field of human affairs, as in the realm of nature, God is immanent, though in the former His working is complicated by the mysterious power of man's will to set itself in antagonism to His; while yet, in manner insoluble to us, His will is supreme. The very powers which are arrayed against Him are His gift, and the issue which they finally subserve is His appointment. It does not need that we should be able to pierce to the bottom of the bottomless in order to attain and hold fast by the great conviction that there is no power but of God, and that from Him are all things and to Him are all things. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The Divine fidelity acknowledged:*—We may note, too, in these verses, the threefold repetition of the one thought, of God's punctual and perfect fulfilment of His word. He "gave unto Israel all the land which He sware to give"; "He gave them rest . . . according to all that He sware"; "there failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken." It is the joy of thankful hearts to compare the promise with the reality, to lay the one upon the other, as it were, and to declare how precisely their outlines correspond. The finished building is exactly according to the plans drawn long before. God gives us the power of checking His work, and we are unworthy to receive His gifts if we do not take delight in marking and proclaiming how completely He has fulfilled His contract. It is no small part of Christian duty, and a still greater part of Christian blessedness, to do this. Many a fulfilment passes unnoticed, and many a joy, which might be sacred and sweet as a token of love from His own hand, remains common and unhallowed, because we fail to see that it is a fulfilled promise. The eye that is trained to watch for God's being as good as His word

will never have long to wait for proofs that He is. "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even he shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord." And to such an one faith will become easier, being sustained by experience; and a present thus manifestly studded with indications of God's faithfulness will merge into a future still fuller of these. For it does not need that we should wait for the end of the war to have many a token that His every word is true. The struggling soldier can say, "No good thing has failed of all that the Lord has spoken." We look, indeed, for completer fulfilment when the fighting is done; but there are brooks by the way for the warriors in the thick of the fight, of which they drink, and, refreshed, lift up the head. We need not postpone this glad acknowledgment till we can look back and down from the land of peace on the completed campaign, but may rear this trophy on many a field, whilst still we look for another conflict to-morrow. (*Ibid.*) *The Supreme Worker:*—We read that on a pyramid in Egypt the name and sounding titles of the king in whose reign it was erected were blazoned on the plaster facing, but beneath that transitory inscription the name of the architect was hewn, imperishable, in the granite, and stood out when the plaster dropped away. So, when all the short-lived records which ascribe the events of the Church's progress to her great men have perished, the one name of the true Builder will shine out, and to the name of Jesus every knee shall bow. Let us not rely on our own skill, courage, talents, orthodoxy, or methods, nor try to build tabernacles for the witnessing servants beside the central one for the supreme Lord, but ever seek to deepen our conviction that Christ, and Christ only, gives all their powers to all, and that to Him, and Him only, is all victory to be ascribed. It is an elementary and simple truth; but if we really lived in its power we should go into the battle with more confidence, and come out of it with less self-gratulation. (*Ibid.*)

CHAPTER XXII.

VERS. 1–34. **Ye have not left your brethren.**—*Helping one another:*—I. THESE TRIBES HELPED THEIR BRETHREN TO THEIR OWN INCONVENIENCE AND POSITIVE DETRIMENT. A narrow-minded, selfish race would have recognised no claim for any service which could not be repaid dollar for dollar. What fine excuses could have been made for the non-performance of this duty if they had been in the excuse-making mood! How prominently that threadbare proverb, "Charity begins at home"—a proverb often outrageously perverted—might have figured in their conversation! We have our own children and our own houses to look after; our crops must be planted and harvested; our homes must be established in this new land; the wandering tribes of our enemies may at any time swoop down upon our vineyards and gardens. Small and selfish souls always reason in this way, whether they live in Palestine or America, in the fifteenth century before Christ or the nineteenth after Christ. Such reasoning and such living inevitably lead to national and individual bankruptcy in all the generous and noble qualities which make a nation great. Let us remember also that it is not what we can spare as well as not which helps our brother. It is not the cast-off coat which we should never wear, the superfluous dollar whose gift we should never feel, that blesses the world; it is the gift that carries part of ourselves with it that helps to regenerate mankind. The Reubenites and Gadites gave themselves, their sturdiest men, their bravest warriors, not merely a quota of drafted hirelings. There is no other brotherly kindness worth the name; a dollar bill given without the personal interest of the one who sends it is but a piece of printed paper; a dollar bill sent with love and prayer, a bill that represents the yearning of some heart to do good, may be—yea, it always is—the winged messenger of God, carrying a blessing to him to whom it goes and leaving a larger one with him who sends it. II. THESE HEROIC ISRAELITES HELPED THEIR BRETHREN PERSISTENTLY AND PATIENTLY. Seven long years passed before all their battles were fought and they were at liberty to return to their wives and their children. In our deeds of benevolence and charity the tendency is to leave the work half-done because of discouragement at the slowness of results. "Ye did run well, who did hinder you?" might be the epitaph on the tombstone of many abandoned schemes of philanthropy. If the world could be converted in a

year, there would be many enthusiastic missionaries among those who now chiefly find fault with the slowness of missionary operations, because the Lord chooses to make use of centuries in bringing about the triumph of His cause. The reason for this seeming slowness of God's hosts is not far to seek. There is more virtue in the fight than in the victory. There are souls to be enlarged, there are sympathies to be quickened, there are lives to be inspired with zeal for God and truth and fellow-men. All this is accomplished by the struggle and not by the ease and the possession of the goodly land that follows the struggle. III. THEIR HOME-COMING AFTER THE SEVEN YEARS OF CONFLICT. There is another home-coming to which every true heart aspires, and the conditions of honourable discharge and of welcome to that home are typified in our lesson. What is heaven except the final gathering-place for those who have helped their brethren for Christ's sake? (*F. E. Clark.*) *Helping others*:—The law for us is the same as for these warriors. In the family, the city, the nation, the Church, and the world, union with others binds us to help them in their conflicts, and that especially if we are blessed with secure possessions, while they have to struggle for theirs. We are tempted to selfish lives of indulgence in our quiet peace, and sometimes think it hard that we should be expected to buckle on our armour and leave our leisurely repose because our brethren ask the help of our arms. If we did as Reuben and Gad did, would there be so many rich men who never stir a finger to relieve poverty, so many Christians whose religion is much more selfish than beneficent? Would so many souls be left to toil without help, to struggle without allies, to weep without comforters, to wander in the dark without a guide? All God's gifts in providence and in the gospel are given that we may have somewhat wherewith to bless our less happy brethren. "The service of man" is not the substitute for, but the expression of, Christianity. Are we not kept here, on this side Jordan, away for a time from our inheritance, for the very same reason that these men were separated from theirs—that we may strike some strokes for God and our fellows in the great war? Dives, who lolls on his soft cushions, and has less pity for Lazarus than the dogs have, is Cain come to life again; and every Christian is either his brother's keeper or his murderer. Would that the Church of to-day, with infinitely deeper and sacreder ties knitting it to suffering, struggling humanity, had a tithe of the willing relinquishment of legitimate possessions and patient participation in the long campaign for God which kept these rude soldiers faithful to their flag and forgetful of home and ease till their general gave them their discharge. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Standing by our brethren*:—A ship arrived at San Francisco recently which had been two hundred and ninety-six days from New Castle, Australia. She had been in great peril in a storm at sea and had had long delays. One night when she was in great danger the captain asked the captain of another ship to stand by through the night, and he did so at great risk to his own vessel and his own life, but finally was the cause of the salvation of the imperilled vessel. As soon as he was safe in harbour the captain of the ship that had been threatened with wreck gave his first attention to showing appreciation of the other captain's assistance, and sent him a gold watch, and went before the council of the city of Sydney and told the story of his heroism. On learning of it the Sydney authorities presented to the noble captain a medal bearing his name on one side, and on the other the simple inscription, "The man that did stand by." In the midst of the campaign for righteousness that is going on in our modern life the noblest ambition for a Christian man is to share the fate of righteousness; to be no more popular than Jesus Christ would be, if He stood in his place, and sought as of old to make it easy for men to do right and hard for them to do wrong. Rather than anything else the Christian man should prize having Christ look down upon him and say: "The man that did stand by." (*Louis A. Banks, D.D.*) **Take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law.**—*The commander's parting charge*:—They were about to depart for a life of comparative separation from the mass of the nation. Their remoteness and their occupations drew them away from the current of the national life, and gave them a kind of quasi-independence. They would necessarily be less directly under Joshua's control than the other tribes were. He sends them away with one commandment, the imperative stringency of which is expressed by the accumulation of expressions in ver. 5. They are to give diligent heed to the law of Moses. Their obedience is to be based on love to God, who is their God no less than the God of the other tribes. It is to be comprehensive—walking in all His ways; it is to be resolute—cleaving to Him; it is to be whole-hearted and whole-souled service, that will be the true bond between the separated

parts of the whole. Independence so limited will be harmless; and, however wide apart the paths may lie, Israel will be one. In like manner the bond that knits all divisions of God's people together, however different their modes of life and thought, however unlike their homes and their work, is the similarity of relation to God. They are one in a common faith, a common love, a common obedience. Wider waters than Jordan part them. Graver differences of tasks and outlooks than separated these two sections of Israel part them. But all are one who love and obey the one Lord. The closer we cleave to Him, the nearer we shall be to all His tribes. (*American Sunday School Times.*) *Universal obligation*:—All the great duties of a Christian life are no more incumbent upon Christians than upon other men; for men are bound to be and to do right on the religious scale of rectitude not because they are Christians, but because they are men. Religious obligations took hold of us when we were born. They waited for us as the air did. They have their sources back of volition, back of consciousness, just as attraction has. Though a man declares himself an atheist it in no way alters his obligations. Right and wrong do not spring from the nature of the Church. Obligation lies deeper than that. It is as much the worldling's duty to love God and obey His laws as the Christian's. (*H. W. Beecher.*) *Obedience unmeasured*:—When the truth of our sincerity requires to be weighed out in drachms and scruples, and runs so sparingly as from an exhausted vessel—when the state of the conscience must be ascertained by a theological barometer, the health of the soul must be in a very feeble and crazy condition. (*H. G. Salter.*) *Sincere obedience*:—If conscience be enlightened, and faithful in the trial, a man cannot deliberately deceive himself: he must know whether his resolutions and endeavours be to obey all the will of God; or, whether, like an intermitting pulse, that sometimes beats regularly, and then falters, he is zealous in some duties, and cold, or careless in others? Saul would offer sacrifice, but not obey the Divine command to destroy all the Amalekites: for his partiality and hypocrisy he was rejected of God. 'Tis not the authority of the lawgiver, but other motives that sway those who observe some commands, and are regardless of others. A servant that readily goes to a fair or a feast, when sent by his master, and neglects other duties, does not his master's command from obedience, but his own choice. Sincere obedience is to the royalty of the Divine law, and is commensurate to its purity and extent. (*Ibid.*) **What trespass is this that ye have committed?**—*The memorial altar*:—1. Notice the proper jealousy of the elders. When the chiefs of the tribes of Israel heard of this altar they arose in great alarm and went down to their brethren, the two and a half tribes, to demand an explanation. Their jealousy was hasty, it was ignorant and uncharitable, but it was not unnatural. It arose, indeed, from a misunderstanding. They imagined that the eastern men were wishful to do the exact opposite of that which was in their hearts; they took the altar to be a sign and a means of division, whereas it was intended to be a symbol and an influence for unity. Such misunderstandings often and naturally arise. Men look at what others are doing; they do not stay to inquire, they assume they know all about it; they read in what they see their own notions, and hence they come to unwise and uncharitable opinions. It is surely necessary that Christian men, in judging each other's work, should cultivate a spirit of candour, should be anxious to be clear in judgment, should assume the better motive until the worse is proved; and should remember that, within the limits of what is right, there is room for wide difference of taste, even where there is equal loyalty for the truth and equal anxiety for its maintenance. 2. Now notice the anxiety of the fathers. They were very anxious to have a symbol of unity. They themselves, who had borne a part in every conflict, could never forget the battle or the victory; but to their children those memories might become dim, and might even become to be thought mere myths, and so they desired a symbol, the existence of which could only be accounted for by the fact symbolised, and the sight of which, exciting curiosity and comment, should keep the glorious facts alive amongst them. And they were surely right. Symbols and monuments are useful, the human mind requires them, and men in all ages and lands have provided them: erected on the sites of great battles, as Waterloo and Quebec; to commemorate great discoveries, such as chloroform; or great inventions, such as the steam engine; they have been executed to keep green the memory of great men. The busy world is only too apt to forget its benefactors and to lose trace of the events which have been mightiest in moulding its fortunes, so the instinct of men has led them to keep alive precious memories by monumental symbols. And the principle has been recognised by God Himself,

and has been embodied in the institutions of the Church. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a symbol, a memorial observance in which we do show forth the Lord's death till He comes. By its frequent observance the Church recalls to the mind of its members and the attention of the thoughtless world the supreme fact of human history. And surely never were becoming memorials of great and noble events more necessary than in our own time! These are days of rush and hurry unexampled. Events succeed each other so rapidly that one impression overlays, and perhaps effaces, its predecessors. Anything that will help us to keep in mind great deeds done for God and man, and their influence on subsequent events, will preserve the rich treasure of our spiritual heritage. 3. But, again, those fathers were anxious for a link with the past. They were unwilling that the continuity of their history should be broken. They, and their children after them, would be impoverished if the memories of the past should be lost. Some of them might be memories of shame, but even therein were precious lessons of warning; and many of them were memories of triumph invaluable for the inspirations to duty and to enterprise which they conveyed. Those old heroes were unwilling that the past with its lessons should fade away and disappear, and they were right. How much we owe to the past, though we are often unconscious of the debt! Our position, our mental quality, the balance of our faculties, our peculiar character, have come to us through the mingling of many strains and the influence of a thousand varying circumstances. Our mental conceptions arise out of the heritage of ideas which we find before us when we come into the world, possessed by all minds as a common endowment and embodied in a multitude of forms, literary, mechanical, social, religious. What magnificent possessions the past hands on to us! 4. And, especially, these people were anxious for their children; they were anxious that their share in the toils and risks of the campaigns of Israel should not be forgotten. They were fearful lest their children should lose their part in the original heritage of the covenant. Many causes would favour this: distance, which made it impossible for them to attend the great national festivals; difference of habits occasioned by the different surroundings of their life; the influence of neighbouring idolatry; intermarriage with the tribes hard by—all these things would make it only too likely that, after one or two generations, their children would fall away from the faith of Israel. If by the sight of this great altar overlooking the Jordan they could be reminded of God's claim upon them and God's covenant with them and God's dealing with their fathers, perhaps they might be preserved from the apostasy which would otherwise ruin them. Who does not sympathise with this anxiety of the fathers of the ancient days which has always been a marked characteristic of truly godly men, that they have been anxious for their children's salvation? "Oh, that Ishmael might live before Thee!" is a prayer which has often found echo in the hearts of men. Love itself becomes more true and tender when, with all the other passions, it is sanctified by the indwelling Spirit. Then, too, the successes or failures of life become properly discriminated. Men who see the invisible estimate the more correctly the things temporal and the things eternal. And the chief solicitude for their children comes to be, not that they should be rich or fashionable, but that they should be good. (*T. R. Stephenson, D.D.*) *The altar of testimony*:—Suppose we call the Israelites who built the altar the Eastern Church, and those who found fault with them the Western Church. We shall hope to get instruction from both. From the builders of the altar of testimony we shall ask you to learn a lesson in Christian doctrine; from their brethren of the west, who found fault with them, a lesson in Christian practice. I. Now the story of the altar on the banks of the Jordan appears to me REMARKABLE AS A PERFECT ILLUSTRATION OF WHAT MAY BE CALLED A GREAT SPIRITUAL AMBIGUITY, COMMON (IN FACT, UNIVERSAL) THROUGHOUT THE CHURCH OF THE MODERNS. It certainly is something above and beyond a mere theological refinement when we discuss one with another the right province of duty and work in the system of Christianity. It enters into every judgment we form of other men's Christianity or our own. The hard-toiling Christian, is he a Pharisee or not? The idle and the useless Christian, is he a humble believer in the sacrifice of Christ? Here, then, it is that the Reubenites will come in and render us a valuable service as teachers of sound doctrine. "We dwell," said they, "in the near neighbourhood of idolatrous tribes. There is nothing now—there will be less when we are dead and gone—to mark us out from the heathen and to rank us with the chosen of the Lord." And therefore up went the altar—a memorial, a lasting memorial, in the style of it, or the inscription it bore, that the builders were they who had come up out of Egypt, and belonged to the seed of Abraham according to the promise. And is it not for this

very same purpose that we Christians are commanded to "let your light so shine before men"? The offerings of the silver and the gold, the building of churches, the visiting of the widow and the fatherless, the carrying of the gospel to foreign climes, the reclaiming of untaught and neglected childhood from misery and guilt—there are lesser motives for doing these things, but the chief motive is that we may adorn the doctrines we profess, that men may take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus, and that all the world may discover that ours is no barren or unprofitable faith. Or perhaps, like the Reubenites, our motives may stretch out into other generations. We may build, with our money, and our toils, and our example, and our lives, that our children and our children's children may say of our memory, "Behold the pattern of the altar of the Lord, which our fathers made." But now, mark you. It was an altar that the Church east of the Jordan built up for their memorial. Were the Reubenites wrong in rearing their memorial in the form of an altar? It came out, "Not at all." It was not designed for a victim: no sacrifice, in the proper Shiloh sense of sacrifice, was ever to be offered up from it. "Behold the pattern of the altar of the Lord." That was all they intended by the erection. They would tell the heathen, and their children would tell the children of the heathen, that the Jordan made no difference between them and the seed of Abraham on the other side. They must build something. What shall it be? Why, let it be a model, a copy, of the altar that is at Shiloh. What more fitting? What more pregnant with meaning? It reminds them whilst they live of the one solitary spot where the blood must be shed for the remission of sin; it will prove to friends and enemies, when they themselves are no more, that they too were blessed in faithful Abraham. The altar was a tribute, not a rival, to the tabernacle that dwelt in Shiloh. Oh, beautiful picture this of what a Christian's good works are, and what a Christian's good works are not. They are a memorial, a demonstration. They must take some form. What form shall they have? What? Why the form of patterns, copies, models of the sacrifice of Christ. To be trusted in? To be looked to for salvation? To supplant the offering on the Cross? Nay, indeed, not so. But to do homage to that Cross by imitation, to remind us of it while we live, and to point our descendants to it when we are gone. II. Learn, then, from the warm-hearted Israelites on the east of the Jordan THAT A GOOD MAN'S TOILS ARE NOT THE GOOD MAN'S ATONEMENT, BUT THAT THEY MAY BE REARED, AND MUST BE REARED, IN THE SHAPE AND ON THE MODEL OF CHRIST'S ATONEMENT—an altar, but an altar of witness or testimony, reminding both yourselves and your neighbours of the one sacrifice for sin which, though none can ever repeat, all are commanded to copy. But now it seems hardly possible to make the Reubenites and the Gadites our only teachers in this story. They may render a lesson upon Christian doctrine, but certainly their brethren across the water match them with a lesson on Christian practice. Just think for a moment of the spirit and manner wherein, from the days of the apostles, the Church has carried on the innumerable controversies that split up the Catholic Church into parties. Grace and good works. What a happy thing it would have been for every one but the booksellers if the champions on both sides had only had the charity and good sense to do what the men of Western Israel did towards the men of Eastern Israel three thousand years ago. They condescended first to find out whether, in point of fact, there was any heresy to fight against. "Strike," then, in your controversies, but "hear" first; and when you "strike," let it be only with the strong argument, and never with the frenzy of the persecutor. Remember the words of Bishop Taylor: "Either the disagreeing person is in error, or he is not. In both cases to persecute is extremely imprudent. If he be right, then we do open violence to God and to God's truth; if he be wrong, what stupidity it is to give to error the glory of martyrdom. Besides which, there is always a jealousy and a suspicion that persecutors have no arguments, and that the hangman is their best reasoner." No, no, we will not hastily "bear false witness against our neighbour," but we will speak one to another, and judge other men's servants no longer; and may the very God of peace and love give to all of us to build up everywhere humble models and copies of His great work for our salvation, and help us to do all that we do in the spirit of charity. (*H. Christopherson.*) *The purity and unity of the Church*:—I. THE STATE OF MIND WHICH THE ERECTION OF THIS ALTAR EXCITED IN THE OTHER TRIBES. 1. Zeal for the honour of God. 2. Fear lest they should incur the Divine displeasure. II. THE REAL DESIGN FOR WHICH THE ALTAR WAS ERECTED. 1. It was a memorial that they were one people. 2. It was a memorial that they had one God and one religion. Lessons: 1. These Israelites, by setting up this altar, show their love to the service

and worship of God. Had they not valued their privileges, it would not have occurred to them to provide against the possibility of losing them: that which we value we endeavour to keep. 2. They show their love to their brethren. Had they not felt a regard for them, they would not have sought means to preserve the knowledge of their common relation to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They who sincerely love God will love their brethren, and love will secure unity; but not at the expense of purity. (*Essex Congregational Remembrancer.*) *A supposed wrong explained:*—1. How little reliance can be placed upon hearsay! It is always so difficult to give a true report of what has happened, that to draw inferences from, and institute action upon mere rumour, is a dangerous course. A fact is not necessarily the truth, because it may be but part of the truth. Part of the truth is often the most dangerous, subtle, and wicked lie. A fact is after all but the expression of a motive; so that to grasp the bearing of a fact the motive must be first of all understood. Consequently, hearsay must always be an unsafe, and often a mischievous guide. 2. Notice how a religious symbol, employed with the most innocent design and for a praiseworthy end, was interpreted as a signal of idolatry and rebellion. At the present day, what excites the worst passions so powerfully, and that, too, in the name of religion, as some devout act or pious sign, of which the meaning is not quite clear to the uninitiated, or which prejudice associates with heresy or superstition. 3. If all would follow the example of the Israelites, and, before going to war, as it were, to right a supposed wrong, would first seek an explanation, how often the wrong would be found to have no existence, and how clear of discord the atmosphere of the world would become! 4. Never assume the guilt of those whom you suspect. It creates a prejudice in one's own mind, which it is hard to overcome. It makes one's own manner severe and condemnatory, instead of being conciliatory and impartial. The effect upon the opposite party is to create an attitude of resentment, to excite irritation, to give a sense of injury, to predispose to a perpetuation of the quarrel, instead of seeking to remove it. 5. The eastern tribes behaved with exemplary self-control. They were the grossly injured party. Yet, smarting as they were under the sense of injustice, they did not resent the indignity. You hear no reproaches or recriminations. They simply state their innocence and disclose their real motives. 6. Phinehas and the people blessed God that war was averted. Are we not sometimes disappointed when we find there is no cause for quarrel? (*T. W. M. Lund, M.A.*) *Misunderstanding:*—1. Prepossessions and misunderstandings are too often the occasion of great divisions in the world, and of such as, if not prevented, draw after them very pernicious and fatal consequences. 2. There ought to be the speediest and most effectual care taken for preventing the ill-consequences of such misunderstandings, and to take up the case before it comes to the utmost extremity. 3. The most proper method for preventing such misunderstandings, and for composing differences arising from such misunderstandings, is examination and inquiry into the cause with deliberation and meekness, that they may see where the difference lies, and take the best course for the composing of it. 4. It is a comfortable evidence of God's presence with a people to bless, defend, and prosper them when mistakes are removed, differences happily composed, and they are at union and peace among themselves. (*John Williams, D.D.*) *Misconstruction:*—Thus quarrels among brethren oft arise from mere mistakes, as betwixt Cyril and Theodoret, who excommunicated one another for heresy, &c., yet afterwards coming to a better understanding of each other's meaning, and finding they both held the same truth, they were cordially reconciled. We must justly wonder at the over-hasty jealousy of the ten tribes against their brethren, whose faithfulness and valour for God and His people they had so long experience of in the Seven Years' War; yet now to find fault, when themselves were foully faulty of a rash censure, having only Allegata's, or matters alleged, but no Probata's, or things proved; but alas! how oft doth inconsiderate zeal transport even religious men to uncharitable censures. Would to God all such differences upon mistakes in our day may be as happily ended as this was here, then God is among us (ver. 31), perceivingly; but dissension drives God from us, and will let in dissolution among us if we avoid not all giving offence carelessly and all taking offence causelessly. Oh, that the Lord would take away that morosity and malignity of a censorious spirit from us, and give to us more meekness of wisdom (Jas. iii. 13). The Reubenites, &c., here were really to be commended not only for their care in building this altar for the spiritual good of their posterity (lest they should forsake the sincere service of the true God in their following generations), but also for their meekness when thus foully calumniated. They did not bristle and set up the crest in a way of scornful defiance, but they

calmly sought to give due satisfaction to their offended brethren; and the ten tribes were verily more blameworthy for misconstruing their religious meanings and doings upon such slender grounds as a bare report (without any solid proof), misrepresenting the matter to them. Yet herein were they truly praiseworthy, not only that they were so blessedly blown up with a zeal for God's glory, in preparing war against idolatry, yea, even in one half of the tribe of Manasseh against the other half beyond Jordan, when the purity of their religion came in competition with brotherly affection, like Levi in that heroic act of Divine justice (Exod. xxxii. 26–29), would not spare their own brethren (Deut. xxxiii. 9), but also, and more especially, that the ten tribes first sent Phinehas, so famous for his heroic act against Zimri and Cozbi, whereby God's wrath was appeased (Num. xxv. 8–11; Psa. cvi. 30), to compromise the controversy, which he happily effected without any imbruing their hands in one another's blood. Sure I am we want such a Phinehas in our day to put an happy end to our unhappy differences. (*C. Ness.*)

Ver. 20. **Achan . . . perished not alone in his iniquity.**—*Achan and his punishment:*—Where could I allege Scripture so wonderful to show the mystery of God's justice, lest we speak unadvisedly with our lips: "Why art Thou so wrath with the sheep of Thy pasture?" Strike once upon this rock of justice, and I dare promise a fountain will issue out from thence of fear and reverence not to provoke the Lord by sins and trespasses; for if He threaten, shall He seem as one that mocks? First, We must put the cause foremost, the cause of all the wrath that follows, and that both general: it is iniquity, and with an instance his iniquity. The subject, Achan, but not alone; the affliction, that he perished. Now let not any man make it a fallacy to deceive his own soul. Doth not the cause deserve severe arraignment? Then blaspheme not as the wicked do: "He seeketh an occasion to punish." Sin in its essence is confederate with death and punishment. Thus much for the cause in general. But what offence his iniquity did give, the sin of Achan will ask a peculiar and a larger trial. You are deceived if you think it was but larceny or greedy pilfering. But heinous was the fact of Achan, first in scandal, that an Israelite, preserved so long in the wilderness, one that fought the Lord's battles, and came always home with victory, that he should be the first that trespassed among the Canaanites, the heathen that would blaspheme the living God. Secondly, In disobedience: that Joshua, his noble general, made the head of all the tribes by God's appointment, and Moses' good liking, and Eleazar's unction, could not command to be obeyed. Thirdly, In faithless covetousness. That since manna did fall no more from heaven about their tents, the Lord did heed His people no longer, every man must catch what come to his hands, so Achan took the accursed, &c. Here is scandal to them that were without; within themselves contempt of the Lord and His servant Joshua, in his own heart an inordinate desire to grow rich and sumptuous. Now turn to the punishment of this man. Behold Achan, the son of Zerah, that man perished not alone in his iniquity. Achan that had outlived the corruption of his young years, and was grown in age able to go to warfare, to have many children, to know how to steal from God, and dissemble with Joshua, doth his hoary head go down with peace into the grave? Like the web of Penelope, all that hath been wrought in the year may be ravelled out in a night. Secondly, He that was spared among all the dangers of the wilderness is consumed in the city; he that could escape the pilgrimage of forty years is doomed to die in Canaan; he that was not devoured in the fire of Taberah is burnt in the valley of Achor. As Aristotle speaks of Homer's poetry, when he set up walls for Troy in one book, and plucked them down in another. They that walk in the night preserve the flame of their torch or candle from winds and casualties abroad, which notwithstanding they put out when they return to their home. So Achan that walked over the sea, when the bridge was under water, and lived among scorpions, and was not consumed in the sedition of Dathan, nor slain in the battles of Moab, yet the vessel is not cast away in the ocean sea, but in the haven, and his light is put out at home in the long-expected Canaan. Note this, thirdly, in Achan's person, mischief did light upon him, not in the hunger and thirst of the wilderness, not in his poverty, but having compiled much riches together, enough to purchase a good fee-simple in Canaan if the Lord had not given him his portion. Men think themselves nowadays past the law and penalties of death, when they have sinned so much that they are grown wealthy in iniquity; because, if need be, they can buy the favour of the judge. But this man, when he was furnished to live sumptuously, then he is out off, that, as Solomon says, the remembrance of death may be bitter to that man,

who thought it pleasant to live. This was St. Austin's rule when he was old and had learnt the world: "I fear no hurt from the world when it goes against me, and casts a froward look upon my fortunes, but my danger is near at hand, when it smiles and flatters me, as if all were happy." The sponges that swell with liquors are most likely to be pressed and emptied. Now recollect these three qualities of Achan, who was more likely to prosper than a soldier in the flower of his age, a joyful man at his journey's end in the land of his peace, a wealthy man in the plenty of his riches. Take it to thought, all you that have the world tied unto you with a threefold cord of health and peace and prosperity, which men dream as if it could not be broken; for it broke like tow among the sparks. I have many theorems to propound unto you, but all shall end in this doctrine, that excepting the first Adam, the root of our corrupt nature, and excepting the second Adam, who, being without spot or sin, gave Himself to the death of the Cross for the sins of all the world, these two excepted, every man dies for his own iniquity. First, I do presume that you will consent unto me that the heart of man is only evil continually, and that we may call it, as Theodorus did revile Tiberius, mud tempered with pollution. Then, it is confessed, that the wages of sin is death. Give me your credit but to one thing more. You are bound to answer to as painful and severe a death as God's vengeance shall inflict upon you. Observe these points, then. First, If the disobedience of one sinner is enough to consume many persons, Lord whither will a multitude of iniquity send one man headlong? Sufficient are our evil days wherein we have walked too much before after the vanity of our mind. Secondly, As the greatest unity of the triumphant Church above doth consist in the glory which they enjoy together in the sight of God, so our unity of the militant Church below is to suffer and die together. It is that which must combine the souls of Christians. Thirdly, Shall not this make me as careful to prevent every man's sins as mine own? Shall I not offer myself to be my brother's keeper? Like watchmen that compass the city in the night, not only for the safety of their own house, but lest any mansion take fire about them. Thus is the brief sum of the second part of my text, man perished in iniquity. Secondly, That man Achan, a branch of the olive tree, even Israel which God had planted. But an evil branch is evil though the stock were a cedar of Libanus. Is it any glory for the dead branches to boast they were vine branches, and not heythorn, since they are cut off and cast away? Lastly, He fell down like the tower of Siloam, and brained all that were about him. I have but one short part to dispatch, his execution, that man perished, &c. To search much into Achan's punishment were not the way to be more learned, but more tormented. Briefly thus, Every man in the rank of a subject lives under the authority of three commanders—1. Under the conscience of his own heart. 2. Under the laws of his king. 3. Under the commandments of God. And if we displease either God or the king, or our own conscience, vengeance meets us on every side. Conscience hath a worm in store, nay, a cockatrice to sting us; the magistrate bears a sword to divide us; but especially it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. In an evil conscience we die unto all joy and comfort; in our trespass against the laws of man we die unto men; in breaking the statutes of God we die unto heaven: surely he deserved not to die but one death that offended three. Some, perchance, will go a thought further, and pronounce a fearful sentence that this man was wiped for ever out of the book of the living. Nothing should make me mistrustful and doubt of his salvation but his too late repentance. Is this a time to leave off sin when we must leave off life and can sin no more? Do you then come to play the huxters for mercy, as if the market were cheapest at the latter end of the day? (*Bp. Hacket.*) *Achan's sin, and Achan's end*:—I. THE PERPETRATION OF SIN. Iniquity is the common characteristic of all mankind: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." But there is before us a reference to one particular act of sin, which, while proceeding from the depraved heart possessed by the perpetrator in common with others, appears to us in prominent and isolated distinction of enormity. 1. The iniquity of Achan was heinous, on account of its intrinsic nature. It was an act of covetousness. He was beguiled by a greedy and unprincipled desire after the attainment and preservation of wealth. 2. The iniquity of Achan was perpetrated against the Divine command, distinctly expressed and amply known. 3. The iniquity of Achan was heinous on account of its attendant dissimulation and attempted concealment. II. THE INFLICTION OF PUNISHMENT. The punishment of the transgressor himself: "That man perished in his iniquity." The terms of our text appear to justify the implication, that his iniquity was not repented of, and

that therefore it was not cleansed or forgiven; he confessed, but he was not contrite; and the whole spirit of the narrative must be regarded as justifying the view which now is expressed. So that you perceive the death of his body was the sign of the ruin of his soul. And it is true with regard to every impenitent sinner, in every age of the world, who dies in iniquity, that thus he must "perish." "They shall utterly perish in their own corruption." They die "the second death." 2. Observe the punishment of the transgressor, in relation to the interests of others. "That man perished not alone in his iniquity." Men by their iniquity often associate themselves with the ruin of the souls of their fellow-men. It is probable that no person can long continue in a state of alienation from God without exerting (although he attempts it not) some baneful influence on the character and the interests of others; and there are, we have reason to fear, numerous instances in which men by bad example, or even by direct efforts for that purpose, make others "partakers of their evil deeds" and lead them down to hell. How horrible, how thrice horrible, to lead others into the prison! to lash around others the fetters! to administer to others the poison! to enwrap others in the flame! Deeds at which hell itself may wonder and fiend may point with amazement to his fellow-fiend—"That man 'perished not alone in his iniquity'; there is the seducer, and there are his victims—all victims now!" Lessons—1. There ought to be anxious application for the pardon of our transgressions perpetrated in past times. 2. There ought to be the determined repudiation and avoidance of sin for the time to come. 3. There ought to be diligent endeavour to bring our fellow-men to salvation. Some are "not alone in their iniquity"; it must be our ambition not to be alone in our salvation. (*James Parsons.*) *The history of Achan improved:*—I. THE NATURE OF THE INIQUITY WHICH HE COMMITTED. He transgressed the plain command of God, and thus sinned against Him. He no doubt sinned also against his own soul, against his family, and against his people. But no notice is taken of this. What is dwelt upon is, that he sinned against the Lord. His iniquity was a transgression of the command and law and covenant of his God. It implied the basest ingratitude for the mercies he had received, as well as a secret disbelief of the Divine omniscience, power, holiness, righteousness, and truth. Was this sin peculiar to Achan? Are there not many others who are virtually guilty of the same thing? Are there not many who apply to their own use what has been dedicated to God? Are there not many who retain in their own possession gold and silver which they ought to consecrate to Him? Are there not many who rob Him of the time which He has set apart for His immediate worship and service? Are there not many who by no entreaty can be prevailed upon to glorify Him in their body, and in their spirit, which are His? What incited Achan to commit sacrilege, and thus to sin against God, was avarice—an inordinate desire of money, an eagerness of gain. And are there not many who, under the influence of the same sordid spirit, act like him, and thus sin against God and their own souls? "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth." II. THE WAY IN WHICH THE INIQUITY OF ACHAN WAS BROUGHT TO LIGHT. 1. The Lord hates and abhors sin. It is an enemy within the camp which is sure to betray us into the hands of those that are without, and ultimately make us their prey. 2. The Lord sees our sins, however secretly they may be committed. 3. God is able to bring our sins to light even now, and that He frequently does bring them, to our utter confusion. By such visitations in time the Lord warns us of what we are to expect in eternity. III. THE CONFESSION WHICH ACHAN MADE OF HIS INIQUITY. Had Achan made this confession sooner, there would have been room to hope that he truly repented of his iniquity; but as he deferred his acknowledgment of his guilt till the lot actually pointed him out, there is reason to fear that it proceeded at last from no real change of heart; that, in fact, it was constrained and not voluntary. 1. How he was led to commit his iniquity. Mark here the way in which men are frequently led to sin against God. The temptation makes its insidious approach by means of the eyes, or one of the other senses; then there arises in the heart an evil desire for the thing seen; and desire, when it hath conceived, bringeth forth sin. It is necessary, therefore, that we should make a covenant with our eyes, that we should watch against temptation, that we should guard against the first approaches of iniquity, that we should stop every avenue by which sin can enter. 2. How full of fear and disquietude is the life of a sinner. Achan, having taken the accursed thing, hid it in the earth in the midst of his tent. Why? Because he was afraid some one would see it; and in this fear he must have lived day after day, until his iniquity was brought to light. Such always is sin, every

sin, and especially the sin of theft or sacrilege. It deludes those who are under its dominion. It promises them much, but pays them little but wretchedness and misery. It fills them with fears and anxieties, and often causes them to flee when no man pursueth. IV. THE PUNISHMENT WHICH FOLLOWED THE INIQUITY OF ACHAN. 1. As to Achan himself, condign punishment speedily overtook him: "He perished in his iniquity." He suffered death as the due reward of his crime. And such is the wages which every sinner is sure to receive unless he obtains deliverance through the death of Christ, who died that we might live. 2. Others also suffered for the iniquity of Achan: "That man perished not alone in his iniquity." Who, then, perished besides him? Many had perished before him, and perished too for his iniquity, namely, the thirty-and-six men who were smitten by the men of Ai. It is also probable that all his family were put to death with him for the same sin. Such were the dreadful consequences occasioned by the iniquity of this man. And is not sin, even in our own day, frequently followed by similar consequences? How often do we see children suffering for the sins of their parents and parents for the sins of their children? How often do we see thieves and murderers, adulterers, drunkards, and such like, involving their wives and families, and perhaps other relations also, in poverty and disgrace, in troubles and anxieties, in wretchedness and misery, if not in still more awful calamities? How often, also, has one order of society to bear the ill consequences arising from the misconduct of another? Lessons: 1. How wonderful is the patience of God towards the world we live in. In the conduct of Achan we may see, as in a glass, what is the conduct of hundreds and thousands who are now living on the earth. How astonishing, then, is the patience of God! How wonderful that He should still bear with us, that He should still give us space for repentance, that He should still be unwilling that we should perish! Oh, let us not despise the riches of His goodness and forbearance and long-suffering! 2. The patience of God, however great and wonderful, will not last for ever. (*D. Rees.*) *Fellowship in Achan's fall:*—If indeed, says Dr. South, a man could be wicked and a villain to himself alone, the mischief would be so much the more tolerable. But the case, as he goes on to show, is much otherwise; the guilt of the crime lights upon one, but the example of it sways a multitude; especially if the criminal be of any note or eminence in the world. "For the fall of such an one by any temptation (be it never so plausible) is like that of a principal stone or stately pillar, tumbling from a lofty edifice into the deep mire of the street; it does not only plunge and sink into the black dirt itself, but also dashes or bespatters all that are about it or near it when it falls." Well may the note of exclamation follow: how strange, yet how inevitable, the tie which may link our uneventful life with the stormy passions of numbers far away! More wonderful than even the Atlantic cable is declared to be that unknown fibre, along which, from other men's sins, responsibility may thrill even to our departed souls: "a chain whose links are formed perhaps of idle words, of forgotten looks, of phrases of double meaning, of bad advice, of cynical sentiment hardly seriously meant; yet carried on through life after life, through soul after soul, till the little seed of evil sown by you has developed into some deed of guilt at which you shudder, but from participation in responsibility for which you cannot clear yourself." Every sin, we are in fine reminded, may waken its echo; every sin is reduplicated and reiterated in other souls and lives. A distinguished French preacher has a striking discourse on what he entitles the solidarity of evil; and he, too, dilates upon the mysterious links which connect together persons and acts that appear to have nothing in common—suggesting melancholy examples of the contagion of guilt and its consequences, of the expansive power of corruption and its almost boundless results. Very forcibly Mr. Isaac Taylor warns us that in almost every event of life the remote consequences vastly outweigh the proximate in actual amount of importance; and he undertakes to show, on principles even of mathematical calculation, that each individual of the human family holds in his hand the centre lines of an interminable webwork, on which are sustained the fortunes of multitudes of his successors; the implicated consequences, if summed together, making up therefore a weight of human weal or woe that is reflected back with an incalculable momentum upon the lot of each. The practical conclusion is that every one is bound to remember that the personal sufferings or peculiar vicissitudes or toils through which he is called to pass are to be estimated and explained only in an immeasurably small proportion if his single welfare is regarded, while their "full price and value are not to be computed unless the drops of the morning dew could be numbered." (*F. Jacox, B.A.*)

Ver. 22. **The Lord God of gods, He knoweth.**—*God knows* :—It is a great satisfaction when we feel that there is one Being who knows everything. After some great perplexity, some dark hour, or some mysterious visitation, when there seemed to be no clue to an event, no interpretation arching it, and not a spark of illumination about it, it is a blessed relief, both to mind and soul, when we feel that somebody can understand it, can thoroughly sift it, and will in good time bring out its illuminated side, and reveal the spiritual diamonds so long concealed in darkness, sorrow, and grief. God knows—what? The uses of things—why the world was made, why we were made, the meaning of the events that greet us, what lessons they convey, what benedictions they unfold, what promises they hold out, and how much culture we shall gain by them. Can anything be more cheering than this fact, and is there anything strange about it? Strange that the Maker should be familiar with what He has made, wonderful that the Architect should understand all about His building, peculiar that the Creator of the world should comprehend what He has produced? How is it in everyday affairs? Would it not be wonderful if Mozart and Beethoven did not understand their own music, stood apart from it as strangers, and were unable to comprehend the science of its melody? or if Powers stood before one of his statues dumb as an idiot, and unable to give an account of how it was shaped into its wondrous beauty? or if Rubens stared at one of his own pictures with a vacant gaze, and with a total inability to trace out the preparatory steps that led to its execution? Then is it not very natural that the Great Musician of earth and heaven should be able to explain all the grand chorus of the ages, that the Holy Sculptor of all time should be able to describe every particular of His work, or that the Great Painter of both worlds should, with a keen wisdom, delight in His own magnificent paintings? I come now to my second proposition, that grows out of the first—we do not know. Here we find two parties in the Church. One says, "We do not know anything, and never can know anything," and the other says, "We do know something, but that something will not amount to much until God reveals more knowledge." I confess, I do not think that, in order to exalt God, we must utterly extinguish ourselves. If I say that a human being is utterly incapable of ever being enlightened, has no power, and is bound irrevocably to sin, with no chance to escape, you may very properly ask me, "Who could have made such a being as that?" But, because we can do something—aye, many things—and because we are something—aye, much—it does not follow that we can do everything or that we are self-sufficient. No, never. God made us, and therefore we are not failures; and let us not for a moment suppose that God has made a mistake in our creation, but, because we are made, we are dependent, frail, and we must often and always look to our Creator for aid and blessing. We are engirdled by mysteries. Yet is it not something that we can, by the grace of God, think, talk, write, walk, live? and can we speak meanly of one who can do all these things? Forbid it, Father! Make us humble, but do not let us be ungrateful. As we look at history and at historical results, it becomes very evident that all through the past ages there has been a providential plan. If we made ourselves Romans, Grecians, or Hebrews, and if we threw ourselves back thousands of years, we should hardly understand that some of our greatest trials were to prove such a vast benediction to after-ages. We could hardly believe that our decay would prove to others life, and that every pang we suffered, both as nations and as individuals, was in accordance with the great, glorious, and holy scheme of Providence. What would be called in ancient days subjugation, invasion, and a despotism, has since proved emancipation, while the baptism of blood then offered has resulted in the salvation of the future. Time explains a great many things that we do not understand to-day; and events always prove that He who rules the heavens and the earth is never bewildered, nor mistaken, nor vanquished. Let each one of us take our own personal experience and trace it back, and see what we wanted to do and where we wanted to go when God would not let us do it, and when God held us back, and when God seemed to be working against us, and how does the retrospect look with our present experience? Did not God know best? and has not everything come out right, and was it not well for us that years ago a restraining hand was placed upon our pleasures, appetites, and desires? And is it not better that we were turned aside from the road that we desired to travel? I think one of the bewitching attractions of biography rests in the fact that we often detect what appear to be very slight and trivial matters, changing the whole course of a person's life. Washington gave up going into the navy in order to please his

mother; and thus a hero was secured for America and a splendid monument of goodness and greatness for all the world. Franklin started on a journey to Philadelphia as a mere pauper, and went under false promises to London; and thus a philosopher was educated for all time. The eyesight of a Prescott was suddenly eclipsed, but out of that darkness an historian was born, whose sweet rhetoric will always prove a fascination and a culture. Yes, the slightest incidents that we call disappointments are often the turning-points in our experience, and prove the very moment when Heaven interposes, and shapes us for ends more consistent with the will of God. (*Caleb D. Bradlee.*)

CHAPTER XXIII.

VERS. 1–16. I am old and stricken in age: and ye have seen all that the Lord your God hath done.—*Old age*:—As in the snowy realms of the Alps lovely flowers open their cheerful petals to the sky, so, notwithstanding the weight of years and cares, many a sweet flower of hope, and trust, and love, and disinterested friendship, and faith may continue to blossom in the aged heart, and to send out an attractive fragrance for the happiness of others. *Jehovah the champion of Israel*:—The last two chapters of Joshua are very like each other. Each professes to be a report of the aged leader's farewell meeting with the heads of the people. In our judgment, both reports bear on the same occasion; and if so, all that needs to be said as to their origin is, that the author of the book, having obtained two reports from trustworthy sources, did not adopt the plan of weaving them into one, but gave them separately, just as he had received them. The circumstance is a proof of the trustworthiness of the narrative; had the writer put on record merely what Joshua might be supposed to have said, he would not have adopted this twofold form of narrative. What was the burden of Joshua's address? You have it in the words—"The Lord your God is He that fighteth for you"; therefore "cleave unto the Lord your God." You owe everything to the Lord; therefore render to Him all His due. God is expressly set forth as the champion of Israel, fighting for him against the Canaanites, and driving them out. He is here the God of battles; and the terrible desolation that followed the track of Israel is here ascribed to the championship of the Most High. There are some expositors who explain these sayings in a general sense. There are great laws of conquest, they say, roughly sanctioned by Providence, whereby one race advances upon another. Nations enervated through luxury and idleness are usually supplanted by more vigorous races. We cannot vindicate all the rule of the British in India; greed, insolence, and lust have left behind them many a stain. Still, the result on the whole has been for good. The English have a higher conception of human life than the Hindus. They have a higher sense of order, of justice, of family life, of national well-being. There is a vigour about them that will not tolerate the policy of drifting; that cannot stand still or lie still and see everything going wrong; that strives to remedy injustice, to reform abuse, to correct what is vicious and disorderly, and foster organisation and progress. In these respects British rule has been a benefit to India. There may have been deeds of oppression and wrong that curdle the blood, or habits of self-indulgence may have been practised at the expense of the natives that shock our sense of humanity, as if the inferior race could have no rights against the superior; but these are but the eddies or by-play of a great beneficent current, and in the summing up of the long account they hold but an insignificant place. When you survey the grand result; when you see a great continent like India peaceable and orderly that used to be distracted on every side by domestic warfare; when you see justice carefully administered, life and property protected, education and civilisation advanced, to say nothing of the spirit of Christianity introduced, you are unable to resist the conclusion that the influence of its new masters has been a gain to India, and therefore that the British rule has had the sanction of Heaven. Now, in this case, as in the conquest of India by Britain, a process went on which was a great benefit on a large scale. It was not designed to be of benefit to the original inhabitants, as was the British occupation of India, for they were a doomed race, as we shall immediately see. But the settlement of the people of Israel in Canaan was designed and was fitted to be a great benefit to the world. Explain it as we may, Israel had higher

ideas of life than the other nations, richer gifts of head and heart, more capacity of governing, and a far purer religious sentiment. On the principle that a race like this must necessarily prevail over such tribes as had occupied Palestine before, the conquest of Joshua might well be said to have Divine approval. God might truly be said to go forth with the armies of Israel, and to scatter their enemies as smoke is scattered by the wind. But this was not all. There was already a judicial sentence against the seven nations of which Israel was appointed to be the executioner. Loathsome vice consecrated by the seal of religion; unnatural lust, turning human beings into worse than beasts; natural affection converted into an instrument of the most horrid cruelty—could any practices show more powerfully the hopeless degradation of these nations in a moral and religious sense, or their ripeness for judgment? Israel was the appointed executioner of God's justice against them, and in order that Israel might fulfil that function, God went before him in his battles and delivered his enemies into his hands. And what Israel did in this way was done under a solemn sense that he was inflicting Divine retribution. We cannot suppose that the people uniformly acted with the moderation and self-restraint becoming God's executioners. No doubt there were many instances of unwarrantable and inhuman violence. To charge these on God is not fair. They were the spots and stains that ever indicate the hand of man, even when doing the work of God. If it be said that the language of the historian seems sometimes to ascribe to God what really arose from the passions of the people, it is to be observed that we are not told in what form the Lord communicated His commands. No doubt the Hebrews were disposed to claim Divine authority for what they did to the very fullest extent. There may have been times when they imagined that they were fulfilling the requirements of God, when they were only giving effect to feelings of their own. And generally they may have been prone to suppose that modes of slaughter that seemed to them quite proper were well pleasing in the sight of God. For God often accomplishes His holy purposes by leaving His instruments to act in their own way. But we have wandered from Joshua, and the assembly of Israel. What we have been trying is to show the soundness of Joshua's fundamental position—that God fought for Israel. The same thing might be shown by a negative process. If God had not been actively and supernaturally with Israel, Israel could never have become what he was. Moses and his bevy of slaves, Joshua and his army of shepherds—what could have made such soldiers of these men if the Lord had not fought on their side? The getting possession of Canaan, as Joshua reminded the people, was a threefold process: God fighting for them had subdued their enemies; Joshua had divided the land; and now God was prepared to expel the remaining people, but only through their instrumentality. Emphasis is laid on "expelling" and "driving out" (ver. 5), from which we gather that further massacre was not to take place, but that the remainder of the Canaanites must seek settlements elsewhere. A sufficient retribution had fallen on them for their sins, in the virtual destruction of their people and the loss of their country; the miserable remnant might have a chance of escape, in some ill-filled country where they would never rise to influence and where terror would restrain them from their former wickedness. Joshua was very emphatic in forbidding intermarriage and friendly social intercourse with Canaanites. He knew that between the realm of holiness and the realm of sin there is a kind of neutral territory, which belongs strictly to neither, but which slopes towards the realm of sin, and in point of fact most commonly furnishes recruits not a few to the army of evil. Alas, how true is this still! Marriages between believers and unbelievers; friendly social fellowship, on equal terms, between the Church and the world; partnership in business between the godly and the ungodly—who does not know the usual result? In a few solitary cases, it may be, the child of the world is brought into the kingdom; but in how many instances do we find the buds of Christian promise nipped, and lukewarmness and backsliding, if not apostasy, coming in their room! (*W. G. Blaikie, D.D.*)

Ver. 4. **I have divided unto you by lot these nations.**—*Joshua the colonist:*—Great colonists as we are, and greater as, with the growth of our wealth and therefore of our population, we are likely to be, it may prove instructive and also interesting to look at Joshua in the character of a colonist—the leader of the largest band that ever left their old in search of a new home. I remark, then, that the colonisation of Canaan under Joshua was conducted in an orderly manner, on a large scale, and in a way eminently favourable to the happiness of the emigrants and the interests of virtue and religion. It presents us with a model we would do

well to copy. The children of Israel entered Canaan to be settled within allotted borders; by families and by tribes. In their case emigration was thus less a change of persons than a change, and a happy change, of place. No broad seas rolled between the severed members of the same family; there were no bitter partings of parents and the children they feared never more to see: nor did the emigrants, with sad faces and swimming eyes, stand crowded on the ship's stern to watch the blue mountains of their dear native land as they sank beneath the wave. A still more important lesson than that taught by the orderly, just, humane, and happy arrangements of this Hebrew colony is taught us by the care Joshua took of its religious interests. These, the greatest, yet considered apparently the least, of all interests, are sadly neglected in many of our foreign stations; and I have often wondered to see with what little reluctance Christian parents could send their children away to lands where more lost their religion than made their fortune. Whatever we do with our religion, the Hebrews did not leave the ark of God behind them. Regarding it as at once their glory and defence, they followed it into the bed of Jordan, and, passing the flood on foot, bore it with them into the adopted land. Wherever they pitched their tents, they set up the altar and tabernacle of their God. Priests and teachers formed part of their train; and making ample provision for the regular ministration of word and ordinance, they laid in holy and pious institutions the foundations of their future commonwealth. Such are some of the points in which Joshua is to be admired, and imitated, as a model colonist. Alas! while neglecting his example in things worthy of imitation, we have followed it but too closely in the one thing where it affords us no precedent to follow. I refer to the fire and sword he carried into the land of Canaan, and his extermination of its original inhabitants. We have too faithfully followed him in this—with no warrant, human or Divine, to do so. In his bloodiest work Joshua was acting under commission. His orders were clear, however terrible they read. God undertakes the whole responsibility. And be it observed that the children of Israel were blamed not because they did, but because they did not, exterminate the Canaanites—slaying them with the sword or driving them out of the land. The duty was painful and stern; but they lived to find, as God had warned them would happen to them, and as happens to us when we spare the sins of which these heathen were the type, that mercy to the Canaanites was cruelty to themselves. But, admitting that the responsibility is shifted from Joshua to God, how, it may be asked, are the sufferings of the Canaanites, their expulsion and bloody extermination from the land, to be reconciled with the character of God, as just and good and righteous? This is like many other of His acts. On attempting to scrutinise them, mystery meets us on the threshold. No wonder!—when we feel constrained to exclaim over a flake of snow, the spore of a fern, the leaf of a tree, the change of a base grub into a winged and painted butterfly, "Who can by searching find out God? who can find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is higher than heaven, what can we do? deeper than hell, what can we know? the measure thereof is longer than the earth and broader than the sea." Dark as the judgment on Canaan seems, a little consideration will show that it is no greater, nor so great, a mystery as many others in the providence of God. The land of Canaan was His—"The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." And I ask in turn, is the Sovereign Proprietor of all to be denied the right that ordinary proprietors claim—the right to remove one set of tenants and replace them by another? Besides, the inhabitants of Canaan were not only, so to speak, "tenants at will," but tenants of the worst description. Let it be remarked also, that the Canaanites not only deserved, but chose their fate. The fame of what God had done for the tribes of Israel had preceded their arrival in the land of Canaan. Thus its guilty tenants were early warned; got "notice to quit"; might be considered as summoned out. They refused to go. They chose the chances of resistance rather than quiet removal; and so—for be it observed that the Israelites in the first instance were only ordered to cast them out—they brought destruction on themselves: with their own hands pulling down the house that buried them and their children in its ruins. But the children? the unoffending infants? There is a mystery, I admit, an awful mystery in their destruction; but no new or greater mystery here than meets us everywhere else. The mystery of offspring who suffer through their parent's sins is repeated daily in our own streets. It does not alter the case one whit to say that children who die of disease, for instance, die by the laws of nature, while those in Canaan were put to death by the command of God. This is a distinction without a difference; for what are the laws of nature but the ordinances and will of God? Nor is the cloud which here surrounds God's

throne, dark as it seems, without a silver lining. The sword of the Hebrew opens to the babes of Canaan a happy escape from misery and sin—a sharp but short passage to a better and purer world. Thus, and otherwise, we can justify the sternest deeds of which Joshua has been accused. He held a commission from God to enter Canaan and cast out its guilty inhabitants, and, like a woodman who enters the forest axe in hand, to cut them down if they clung like trees to its soil. His conduct admits of the fullest vindication; and though it did not, we should be the last to accuse him. Ours are not the hands to cast a stone at Joshua. A more painful and shameful history than the history of some at least of our colonies was never written. Talk of the extermination of the Canaanites! Where are the Indian tribes our settlers found roaming, in plumed and painted freedom, the forests of the new world? Not more fatal to the Canaanites the irruption of the Hebrews than our arrival in almost every colony to its native population! We have seized their lands; and in a way less honourable, and even merciful, than the swords of Israel, have given them in return nothing but a grave. Professed followers of Him who came not to destroy but to save the world, we have entered the territories of the heathen with fire and sword, and adding murder to robbery, have spoiled the unoffending natives of their lives as well as of their lands. Had we any commission to exterminate? Divine as Joshua's, our commission was as opposite to his as opposing poles to each other. These are its blessed terms, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Can our country and its Churches read that without a blush of shame and a sense of guilt? Let us repent the errors of the past. Not so much to aggrandise our island, as to Christianise the world by our colonies, is the noble enterprise to which Providence calls us. "Go ye in to possess the land"—these, if I may say so, were the marching orders under which Joshua and Israel entered Canaan; and however unable they appeared, in point of numbers and ordinary resources, to cope with those who held the soil, and were prepared to fight like men that had their homes and hearths, their wives and children, to defend, yet then, as still, the measure of man's ability is God's command. Since it is so, what a noble career and rapid conquest were before the children of Israel! Sweeping over Canaan like a resistless flood, they might have carried all before them. What difficulties could prove too great for those who had God to aid them? What need had they of bridge or boats, before whose feet the waters of Jordan fled? of engines of war whose shout, borne on the air, smote the ramparts of Jericho to the ground with an earthquake's reeling shock? of allies, who had Heaven on their side, to hurl down death from the skies on their panic-stricken enemies? How could they lose the fruits of victory over the retreat of whose foes night refused to throw her mantle, while the sun held the sky, nor sunk in darkness till their bloody work was done? (*T. Guthrie, D.D.*)

Ver. 6. **Be ye therefore very courageous.**—*On Christian courage:*—In the first place, in your relation with your fellow-creatures, in your intercourse with the world, it requires much courage and resolution to be sturdily upright and just. When your interest, your feelings, your wants, nay, even your future independence, are on one side, and the plain dictates of duty and religion on the other, then it is that you must "be very courageous"; and not turn aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left. Here is the trial: to prefer the praise of God and the approval of the conscience, with loss, with disgrace or derision, and even poverty for life, to the mean and dishonest acquirement of every worldly good. Courage is requisite even in doing good. Our good actions may cost us much trouble and even expense, much opposition, much vexation, and much misrepresentation; for our good may not only be evil spoken of, but it may be to ourselves a positive evil in a worldly and temporal point of view. On some occasions we may have to encounter the resistance of the indolent and the selfish; the thwarting malignity of envy, that will never either co-operate or commend; the sneers of the niggardly, who revenge an extorted charity by slandering the man that shamed them to it; and the unkind constructions of the worldly, who never attribute disinterested motives to a prominence in well-doing. On other occasions, we may be induced to benefit others, even against their will; to succour the worthless and ungrateful; to weary ourselves in long, and perhaps for the time fruitless, attempts to soften the obstinate, persuade the wilful, reform the profligate. In all these cases we want also a bold and patient decision of character. Again, it requires courage to forgive injuries and endure wrongs, as well as, on the other hand, to ask for forgiveness and to make

reparation. Yet the Christian must do both when necessary. Courage is required, again, in maintaining truth and sincerity. I do not mean by this merely avoiding flagrant falsehood and equivocation; but acquiring habits of open and frank avowal of our minds, except where we may give needless pain or offence. No deference to rank or circumstances, no indolent aversion to differ from others, no ill-timed timidity, or desire to ingratiate, must prevent our bold and determined reprobation of what is decidedly wrong, however glossed by fine language or supported by sophistry and cunning. Courage is very necessary also in setting a good example. We are "neither to love the praise of men more than the praise of God," nor to "follow a multitude to do evil." The real Christian may want resolution to maintain a Christian example; he may shrink from singularity; he may fear a laugh, an obnoxious name, or misrepresentation; he may think it too precise and severe to protest and strive against received customs and opinions, though plainly at variance with the Word of God; or, lastly, he may distrust his own steadfastness and perseverance. Yet all he wants is courage—courage, not to go about setting the whole world right, not to put on a garb of austerity and intolerance that does not belong to him or his religion; not to declare war against practices and amusements which sweeten the busy occupations of life and are decidedly innocent; but to be "steadfast and immovable" in the plain, straightforward course of Christian duties of every kind. Again, courage is most requisite in striving against all the inward corruption of our fallen nature. In the first place, the Christian has to contend with wicked thoughts and tendencies, or inclinations. When allowed to grow to maturity they become headstrong passions, lusts, and appetites, whose power is generally in proportion to the time they have been indulged. At that fearful period, the courage required is, as it were, that of plucking out an eye, or cutting off a limb! for habit has by that time made the indulgence quite necessary to the sinner's happiness, and even comfortable existence. Courage is again necessary, under this head, in getting the better of our natural selfishness. Pride and vanity and pretension are also vices that need no common courage and resolution to master them. They are, however, most unchristian tempers, and must be subdued. But, lastly, it is in perfecting holiness in the heart—by purity, vigilance, discipline, and perseverance—that the Christian warrior has most need of courage and resolution. His enemies are so strong and numerous, and the fort he holds so easily surprised and taken, that he has need of "the whole armour of God," that he may "have victory, and triumph against the devil, the world, and the flesh." (*A. B. Evans, D.D.*) **To keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses.**—*The supreme excellence of Holy Scripture:*—I. THE BOOK COMMENDED: "All that is written in the book of the law of Moses." 1. Observe it was to the written law alone that Joshua directed them. 2. From that day to this the will of God has been made known to us in writing. 3. The evidence of the Divine authority of the New Testament is of the same description. 4. Oh, let the written Word of God, infallible truth, be elevated far, far above the writings of men, however excellent. II. THE EXHORTATION RESPECTING IT: "Be ye therefore very courageous," &c. 1. "Keep it"—treasure it up in your hearts; lodge it in your memories; inscribe it on the tablet of your mind. 2. "Do it." We are not to keep the Holy Scripture as a curiosity in a cabinet; not to hide or bury it, but to practise it. If the Scriptures do not exercise a practical influence over us, they will only increase our condemnation. 3. Observe the universality of the injunction, "All that is written in the book." There is to be no reservation nor exception—no selection of favourite doctrines or of agreeable duties, but "all that is written" is to be read, believed, obeyed! 4. There must be no deviation from the narrow way—"that ye turn not aside therefrom, to the right hand or to the left." This is the chart—be careful to steer by it! This is your map, your guide, your lamp; beware of the smallest deviation! (Isa. xxx. 21). 5. "Be ye very courageous to keep and to do all this!" He had said in the previous verse that God would drive out their enemies before them; and now he says, "Be ye very courageous"—but not to fight with sword and spear, but with spiritual weapons—moral courage: be bold for God—much courage is needed: for want of it Peter denied his Lord. "Be not ashamed of Christ"—"confess Him before men." III. THE CONSEQUENCES OF OBEDIENCE OR DISOBEDIENCE TO THIS EXHORTATION MAY BE LEARNED FROM SCRIPTURE AND EXPERIENCE. Wherever God's written Word was known and read and honoured, religion has flourished; and where that Word has been neglected, religion has decayed. (*Dean Close.*) **Turn . . . not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left.**—*Obedience:*—1. What motive has the Christian to obedience? Looking to be saved

only through the righteousness of another, what is there to induce him to walk righteously before God Himself? (1) Gratitude, or responsive love. The Christian is plied with reminders of what the Lord hath done for him by Christ to open to him the heavenly Canaan and to give him an inheritance, and his grateful heart responds to the heavenly logic, "Take heed that ye love the Lord," "Serve the Lord in truth with all your heart, for consider how great things He hath done for you." "If ye love Me, keep My commandments." (2) Hope. "Ye shall possess their land as the Lord your God hath promised you." Christ is made the author of eternal salvation to them that obey Him; and he that nameth the name of Christ must depart from iniquity. (3) Fear. "When ye have transgressed the covenant of the Lord your God ye shall perish quickly from off the good land." And similar are the rules with regard to entering heaven, of which land Canaan was a figure. Disobedience entails exclusion. 2. But what kind of obedience is necessary, or rather what do we learn from our text, will obedience require or call for? (1) Courage. "Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do." Many look down upon a Christian as a poor, mean-spirited creature, and only half a man. But he is the highest kind of man. In proportion as he acts up to his principles he is a bold, courageous hero, and may stand up among the bravest and noblest, and suffer not by the comparison. Is it a mark of courage to submit to the operator's knife, and a still higher mark to operate upon oneself? This the obedient servant of God does. He plucks out the right eye, he cuts off the right hand of forbidden indulgence; that is, in obedience to God's will he will give up inclinations which cost him as much as plucking or cutting. Is it a mark of courage to face the cannon's mouth? Aye; but it is a higher mark for beings constituted as we are, naturally proud and sensitive, to brave the mouth which sneers and jeers at piety, so that we are often a scorn and derision to them that are round about us. (2) Completeness. "Be ye very courageous to keep and do all," &c. The moral law of Moses, though no longer it can be so kept as to give us a right to eternal life, is to be our guide and rule in our present life. For the ten commandments expanded contain all the precepts, duties, and dispositions of a servant of God, just as buds contain all the leaves of that flower which opens out into such fulness of detail. And the Christian is to keep and do all. (3) Carefulness. "That ye turn not aside," &c. The path of obedience is generally a middle path, and we must seek to have such views of God's Word, under the teaching of God's Spirit, that our love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment, that we may approve things that are excellent; or, as it might be rendered, "discriminate things that differ," and ever hear a voice behind us saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it." The extreme opposite of wrong is not right. We go safest between extremes. The pendulum swings as far to the right hand as it does to the left, and because some persons go to extremes one way, we are apt to go to extremes the opposite way. Some are all for privilege, others all for duty; but we must turn not aside to the right or left. Thankful for privileges, we must do our duty. (*H. C. Mitchinson, M.A.*)

Vers. 8, 9. **Cleave unto the Lord your God, as ye have done unto this day.**—*The necessity of every one's cleaving to God who wishes well to the support of his country*:—I. SIN HAS NATURALLY IN ITSELF A TENDENCY TO THE RUIN OF ANY NATION. We may easily see that when a people grow regardless of the laws of God they want the greatest obligations of obedience to the laws of men. II. SIN MAKES GOD AN ENEMY. God presides with a peculiar providence over societies and communities of men. We may learn from the history of all past ages and the frequent smart of our own that the government of God is ever administered according to the nature of men's actions; that He dispenses His favour to a people, or withdraws it from them, as virtue or vice, religion or impiety, respectively prevail among them. But perhaps it may be said by some who are ready to impute all successes to themselves, "What need we to call in Providence in all difficulties?" Now this, give me leave to prove more particularly, by considering those three main props on which the weight of states and empires may seem to them, who look not far into things and their causes, wholly to rely; that is, worldly providence, or policy in contriving; courage and force in executing great designs; and a wise improvement of both these, by firm and well-grounded confederacies. But alas! in these, barely considered, there can be no safety, because no human foresight can reach those many accidents, the least of which may alter the best-laid counsels; nor any human courage, though never so well seconded, be sure to execute them, since the very execution of them is attended

with so many circumstances as may produce effects quite different from what they proposed. III. THE OBLIGATION, WHICH LIES ON EVERYBODY WHO LOVES HIS COUNTRY TO DO HIS DUTY TO GOD, FROM WHICH SUCH UNIVERSAL VIRTUE AND PIETY WILL RESULT, AS WILL MOST CERTAINLY ENGAGE GOD ON OUR SIDE. 1. That all national favours flow purely from God, I will presume has been sufficiently proved, as being beyond the single or united force of human policy, courage, or the firmest alliances: if so, what is it more than our bounden duty, and justice, to acknowledge unfeignedly the gift to God, who desires no more for the giving it? He is not bettered by our thanksgivings, yet is pleased with the gratitude. 2. We ought to break off the course of those sins which will estrange God from us, and deprive us hereafter of all such extraordinary successes. (*Bp. Trelawney.*) *Religious stability enforced* :—I. THE DUTY THE TEXT RECOMMENDS. Cleaving unto the Lord evidently implies—1. Previous union with Him. 2. Faithful adherence to Him. Our religion must be uniform and constant; we must not only come to the Lord as humble penitents, but also adhere to Him as His indefatigable servants. (1) We should cleave to His name; as the fountain of all goodness, from whom we receive every blessing; and therefore should continue to love, obey, hope, and trust in Him, as the God of our salvation (Isa. xii. 2; Hab. iii. 18). (2) We should cleave to His Word; by faithfully reading its contents, imbibing its doctrines, obeying its precepts, and by making it the perpetual subject of our meditation and prayers, and the infallible rule of our faith and conduct (Psa. cxix. 18, 148; John v. 39; 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17). (3) We should cleave to His ways; by diligently discharging all personal and relative duties, constantly attending all the means of grace, working out our salvation with fear and trembling, and by "walking in all the commandments and ordinances blameless." (4) We should cleave to Him at all times: in prosperity and adversity, in tribulation and distress, in health and affliction, in life and death; implicitly trusting "in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." II. THE IMPORTANCE THE TEXT INVOLVES. This evidently appears, both from the solemnity of the occasion on which it was delivered, and the fervency of the manner in which it was urged on the tribes of Israel. 1. This duty is reasonable (John vi. 67–69; Rom. xii. 1, 2). 2. This duty is honourable. Instability in religion is peculiarly disgraceful (2 Pet. ii. 20–22). It is extremely weak and childish, and should be carefully avoided, as displeasing to God, and dishonourable to our holy profession (Eph. iv. 14). 3. This duty is profitable. It is only by cleaving unto the Lord that we can maintain personal piety, overcome our enemies, encounter difficulties, rejoice evermore, triumph over death, and "lay hold on eternal life" (Deut. iv. 3, 4; Psa. lvii. 7; 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8). 4. This duty is indispensable. Final perseverance is necessary to final salvation. He only that "endures to the end shall be saved" (1 Cor. xv. 2; Rom. ii. 7; 2 Pet. i. 10, 11). III. THE MOTIVES TO THIS DUTY. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*)

Ver. 11. **Take good heed therefore unto yourselves.**—*The Christian warfare* :—The Christian life is a warfare, and there are several common mistakes made thereupon. For example—1. WHEN IT IS SUPPOSED THAT THE ENEMIES TO BE FOUGHT AGAINST ARE ALL EXTERNAL FOES. This is a very prevalent error. Where conversion is believed to be always a sudden change, and not a matter of growth, there converts are cautioned against dangers that lie without, while left in ignorance of the greater dangers that are still within. There are external foes, but these are not all. There are inward foes, such as—(1) Evil tempers; (2) passionate and ungovernable wills; (3) covetousness; (4) selfishness; (5) pride; (6) anger, &c. II. IT IS ALSO A MISTAKE TO SUPPOSE THAT THE ENEMIES TO BE FOUGHT AGAINST ARE CHIEFLY EXTERNAL ONES. With all his warnings against surrounding foes, Joshua was most emphatic in his exhortation to watchfulness over one's own heart, "Take good heed therefore unto yourselves." In this sense a man's enemies are they of his own house. The greatest temptations arise from that inner tendency to corruption, but for which the outward influences would be well-nigh powerless. Many a man has been his own tempter (Jas. i. 14). III. IT IS A GREAT CHRISTIAN DUTY, THEREFORE, FOR EVERY MAN TO BRING HIS OWN HEART INTO SUBJECTION. 1. This cannot be done except by the exercise of constant watchfulness. 2. Self-cultivation also is necessary. When will men learn that religion is no dreamy sentimentalism, but a stern and living reality? "The grace of God in the heart of man is a tender plant in a strange, unkindly soil, and, therefore, cannot well prosper and grow without much care and pains, and that of a skilful hand."

Let us, then, "take heed to ourselves." Let us keep the fortress of our own heart. Let us do battle with the foes of our own household. Thus shall we be "more than conquerors"; for "he that ruleth his own spirit is better than he that taketh a city." (*Frederic Wagstaff.*) *Self-consideration:*—We can have no aspirations unless we know what we lack, and we cannot properly cultivate our spiritual life unless we recognise the symptoms of its vitality or decay. A gardener would be failing in his duty if he did not notice the withering of a flower, which was only wanting more room in which to spread its roots. A mother would be justly blamed if she was too absorbed in making her child's dress for a coming party to notice the pale face and heavy eyes which foretold an illness demanding instant attention. Far heavier is the responsibility resting on us to consider our own condition. (*A. Rowland, B.A.*) *Self-judgment:*—No sane man fails to form some opinion of himself. We cannot help knowing, for example, whether our temper is quick or dull, whether our imagination is vivid or torpid, any more than we can be ignorant of the fact that we are tall or short. But we ought not to leave this self-judgment to transient feelings, or to spasmodic revelations—but should try to shape it by sober thought. Some people tell us that it is best not to think of ourselves at all, but to absorb ourselves in daily duty, leaving ourselves simply in God's hands, so far as religious life is concerned. No doubt this is partly true: and we must not forget that self-introspection has its dangers as well as its uses. It would, for example, be quite possible to subject our motives to such close and constant scrutiny as to take away all momentum from life: but no sensible man would be so particular about dust on the engine, as to neglect keeping up steam. (*Ibid.*) **That ye love the Lord.**—*Take heed to love God:*—1. Because if you do not love God, your obedience will be worthless. 2. Because if you do love Him, obedience will be easy. 3. Because there are so many things that compete for your love. 4. Because if you love God, you will love only good things, and those in a proper measure. 5. Because if you love God, you will love what God loves, and especially His Son Jesus Christ. (*The Hive.*) *God demands our love:*—I. IT IS FOR THIS VERY END THAT NATIONAL MERCIES ARE BESTOWED. II. WE ARE IN DANGER OF PERVERTING HIS GOODNESS TO A VERY DIFFERENT PURPOSE. The caution given in the text plainly implies this, and the subsequent history of the Jewish nation as plainly proves that the caution was necessary. III. To love the Lord our God is not only the return He expects for His benefits, but THE RETURN HE DEMANDS. It is not only just and reasonable in its own nature, but it is likewise absolutely necessary on our part—nay, it is the one thing needful, the withholding of which shall unavoidably be attended with the most fatal consequences. (*R. Walker.*)

Ver. 14. And behold this day I am going the way of all the earth.—*Death common to all:*—Death is so dim-sighted and so blundering-footed that he staggers across Axminster tapestry as though it were a bare floor, and sees no difference between the fluttering rags of a tatterdemalion and a conqueror's gonfalon. Side by side we must all come down. No first class, second class, or third class in death or the grave. Death goes into the house at Gad's Hill, and he says, "I want that novelist." Death goes into Windsor Castle, and he says, "I want Victoria's consort." Death goes into Ford's Theatre, at Washington, and says, "I want that President." Death goes on the Zulu battlefield, and says, "I want that French Prince Imperial." Death goes into the marble palace at Madrid, and says "Give me Queen Mercedes." Death goes into the almshouse, and says, "Give me that pauper." Death comes to the Tay Bridge, and says, "Discharge into my cold bosom all those passengers." (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *Premonitions of death:*—The first symptom of approaching death with some, is the strong presentiment that they are about to die. Oganan, the mathematician, while in apparent health, rejected pupils from the feeling that he was on the eve of resting from his labours; and he expired soon after of an apoplectic stroke. Fletcher, the divine, had a dream which shadowed out his impending dissolution, and believing it to be the merciful warning of Heaven, he sent for a sculptor and ordered his tomb. "Begin your work forthwith," he said at parting; "there is no time to lose." And unless the artist had obeyed the admonition, death would have proved the quicker workman of the two. Mozart wrote his Requiem under the conviction that the monument he was raising to his genius would, by the power of association, prove a universal monument to his remains. When life was fleeting very fast, he called for the score, and musing over it, said, "Did I not

tell you truly that it was for myself that I composed this death chant?" Not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord . . . spake.—*Joshua's dying testimony to the faithfulness of God*:—I. DEATH IS A WAY. It leads the believer from the means and streams of religious ordinances to the fountain-head of living waters; from the society of earthly, and at best imperfect connections, to the company of triumphant saints, &c. II. Death is a way THAT ALL MUST GO. Some journeys may be deferred and postponed a week, a month, a year, and perhaps be wholly declined. But this cannot be put off or avoided. III. Death is a way WHICH WE MAY SOON BE REQUIRED TO TAKE. (*Isaac Bachus, D.D.*) *Joshua's last confession*:—With Joshua as with Simeon, at eventide it was light, the hues of a golden sunset coloured with the tints of the rainbow, which St. John beheld before the throne. The words that I have read to you contain a retrospect and a prospect. He looks behind for them; he looks forward for himself. 1. We, too, have a retrospect like his, and we too have a prospect. Let us look back at life, each from our own standing-point, each colouring with the hues of his own experience the common outline. Begin at the beginning, and look back at childhood. I do not think childhood the happiest time of life, and therefore I will not say it is. And yet in the spring of our life, though it had its biting winds and its cold nights, lest our characters should bud too fast and in an atmosphere too genial we should grow unequally and develop too rapidly, there were gleams of bright sunshine, showers dropping with fruitfulness, in which our minds expanded and our souls grew. Some of us it may be were brought to the feet of Jesus, to hear His Word. As children we knew the Holy Scriptures, and our infant lips were tutored in prayer. But manhood is the time of man's glory, when we partake of the full joys of home life, when opinions mature and cultivation grows, and experience mellows, and noble duties open out before us, and grow into the full liberty of the sons of God, and by faith we overcome the wicked one. Oh, how full manhood may be of pure and generous happiness, if lived unto God, if we will but look up to Him as a reconciled Father, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost follow the Lamb whithersoever He went on earth! Sorrow there must be, but there is strength to bear it; losses, but there is time to redeem them; sin, but the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin; imperfectness, but then we are complete in Him. And then, as to old age, in one view of it that is the best of all. The aged man, if he is a Christian, is nearly at home. His activities may be diminished, but his wisdom is augmented. If not strong in action, he is great in counsel. He looks back over a past of unbroken, unvarying love, and his song is, "Surely, goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life; I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." Oh, I pray you, wherever in life you be, whatever in life you have, gather up your mercies and count them; see how the Lord's faithfulness has given you every one of the good things that He has promised to His people. Where you wandered, it was through your own wilfulness, and He brought you back. When you fell He lifted you up. When you wept your tears came to you with a message from God. You may indeed be forgetting Him; that I know not, but this I do know, that He has been love to you, trying to embrace you with the arms of His mercy, willing to draw you with the cords of love. 2. There is also a prospect. "Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth." "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after that the judgment." My brethren, this way is a universal way, and a sorrowful way, and a cloudy way. (*Bp. Thorold.*) *Joshua intimating his own departure, and the favour of God toward Israel*:—I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH JOSHUA HERE REPRESENTS HIMSELF AS PLACED. Time has gathered death's memorials on that form; and warned, perhaps, by some communication from the world invisible, or feeling, it may be, in the pain, the weakness, or the gathering wrinkles, that his closing hour is near, he thus addresses the multitude around: "Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth." What was dying Joshua but just the representative of dying man? and what is Joshua dead but an instance, from the midst of ten thousand times ten thousand of the human form, erect and strong, and animated once, consigned to mournful silence, and the human spirit vanished from the scenes of enterprise and life, where it thought so loftily or toiled so zealously of old? And if we commit ourselves to the pages of recorded history, and find them full throughout with the alternations of life and death, or mark the common course of society and providence around us, how many an illustration may be found of what to us is specially momentous in the idea afforded by the words, "the way of all the earth"! II. THE APPEAL WHICH JOSHUA MAKES TO THE PEOPLE HE ADDRESSES. 1. Joshua's appeal may suggest the idea of a pious and active old

age. To earlier years and robuster vigour may belong the more stirring and laborious forms of Christian enterprise and zeal; but age has the same principles of duty to regard, and the same animating motives to cherish in the heart. In the apparent proximity of death it has a consideration in some degree peculiar, to urge it on to zealous and devoted services for God; and, oh! how powerfully ought that consideration and many a motive else to animate the minds of those who, "old and stricken in age," are ready, like Joshua, to say, "I am going the way of all the earth"! If you have given your more vigorous years to sin, why should you delay with contrite and devout heart to give the close of your continuance here to Christ, and piety, and God? And if you have, in some degree, like Joshua, given your earlier life to the cause of righteousness, oh! have you not found, in your experience of its dignity, and blessedness, and worth, a motive strong to keep you steadfast to the end? 2. Not only is the appeal of Joshua in the text representative of a pious and zealous old age, but it expresses an important fact presented by the providence of God: "Ye know," says he, "in all your hearts, and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed," &c. Of all men Christian believers perhaps will be the readiest to perceive, and the most willing to acknowledge, the absolute faithfulness and the gracious liberality of God; and how can they but know that, sad as the outward condition of God's chosen may sometimes be, and sadder still as may be the general aspect of the earth, to neither can the Almighty's pledge be broken, to neither can His promise fail? (*Alex. S. Patterson.*) *A man dying*:—I. A man dying IN PHILOSOPHIC CALMNESS: "I am going the way of all the earth." 1. It is not a strange road. All that have ever been, have gone through it; and all that ever will be, must. 2. It is not an avoidable road. To complain is useless. II. A man dying FULLY SATISFIED WITH GOD: "Not one thing hath failed," &c. 1. That God had promised "good things." 2. That all the "good things" promised had come. III. A man dying WITH SPIRITUAL INTEREST IN SURVIVORS: "Ye know," &c. He wished his contemporaries and survivors to cherish confidence in God when he was gone. (*Homilist.*) *The solicitude and testimony of a dying man*:—I. THE SOLICITUDE OF A NOBLE VETERAN. Joshua was solicitous that the Israelites (1) should continue in love to God (ver. 11); (2) should be separated from the world (vers. 7, 12, 13); (3) should be courageous in the ways of righteousness (ver. 6). II. THE TESTIMONY OF AN AGED PILGRIM: "And behold this," &c. We learn here (1) That the faithfulness of God may be relied on. (2) That the faithfulness of God extends to all His children. (3) That the faithfulness of God is to His believing ones a conscious realisation. III. THE CALMNESS OF A DYING SAINT. What a peaceful, glowing sunset! (*W. Fry.*) *Joshua's retrospect*:—There are certain occasions in life when it is irresistibly natural to look back. After climbing a difficult ascent, or concluding a tedious negotiation, or even winding up a long and troublesome letter, we like to take a final view of the whole. Joshua had now arrived at the culminating point of his mission. I. THE LARGENESS OF GOD'S PROMISES. To bring Israel out of the prison-land of Egypt, through the death-land of the wilderness, into triumphant possession of the fortress-land of Canaan, was what God undertook. If some great leader had undertaken, some years back, to emancipate the negroes of the Southern States of America, to conduct them over the broad Atlantic, and make them owners and masters of military and imperial France, he would scarcely have promised any more, allowing for the difference of the times. All God's promises are "exceeding great and precious." II. THE STEADINESS OF GOD'S PURPOSES. Just when the promise appeared utterly forgotten, its final fulfilment was being planned. Just when the good seed appeared altogether perished, the labourers who were to gather in the harvest were being engaged. The rest of the history to which Joshua looked back furnished other instances of like kind. III. THE COMPLETENESS OF GOD'S WORK. God had wrought all that He had promised. I apply the subject to the earnest expectations of the humble believer in Christ. You too are looking forward to the end of your wanderings, to the enjoyment of absolute rest, to perfection of spiritual condition, to the subjugation of every enemy, in a word, to complete conformity to your Lord. Be assured that the time is approaching when you shall look back in triumph upon all. (*Homilist.*) *The last words of Joshua*:—You can hardly overdraw the character of the patriarch warrior who is about to surrender his command. He is one of the rare men of either economy of whom inspiration, always faithful, has preserved no record of blemish. And if you ask wherein lay the main charm of his character, we find it in the fact that he himself is so much concealed behind the grandeur of his own exploits. That is the highest order of excellence—to be self-

concealed by the glory of events whereof we are the authors. "I have sent for you," said a great man of modern days, from his death-bed to a youth who stood beside him, "that you may see how a Christian can die." Let us see how a "servant of the Lord" can die who only saw the day of Christ from a distance. We might dwell, for a warrant in favour of repetition, on the fact that Joshua spends his last breath in telling something to the children of Israel which he himself admits they know already "in all their hearts and in all their souls." Old-fashioned doctrines never look so new, never so precious, as when seen from the edge of the grave. But what absorbs the interest of this spectacle is not so much the triteness of the discussion as the motive that moved to its delivery. If Joshua does not say, he implies, that because the chills of death are at the very moment creeping round his heart and the tongue will not serve him much longer, on that very account he stirs them up to remembrance that "the Lord has not been slack concerning His promise." Oh, surely, this is something new in the treatment of an old doctrine! The last faculties of the mind before it ceases to act and move amongst the living, turned upon the character and the honour of the great God, and that not so much towards the man himself, but towards the other men addressed. That a human being should be so able to forget himself, if not in the very struggles, in the nearest prospect, of mortality, as to busy himself entirely with the credit and the character of his Creator, that he should gather around him the thousands who will survive him, for nothing but to wring from them the acknowledgment that God is true—oh! you may fairly enough conclude that the speaker is not far off the world where God will be all in all. There is no test of a man's chief good like death. The miser will ask for his old strong-box to be placed beside him on the bed that he may see the last of the deity he has worshipped whilst he lived. The husband will turn his latest, fondest look, amongst all bystanders, towards the one sad face that belongs to her who has weathered with him so many a storm, and proved her love through evil and through good report. The statesman wanders in his last delirium on the future of the country, the helm of whose affairs he is quitting for ever. The scholar, too, seems reluctant to die till that one great work, the study of years, has received its finishing touch; and the mechanician, or the chemist, or the astronomer, is startled by the grim summons from the busy calculation, or the tiresome experiment, or the sweeping survey of the stars. And if each of these were to leave a witness from the death-bed, that witness would turn for a topic to the favourite and the darling of the life that is leaving him. Joshua does the same. "What will they think of my God when I am gathered to the grave? I know Him, but do they? They do; but will they remember what they know? Will they serve my God as if they recollected that He has never failed them? It is not certain hearts that know forget: souls that have learned love their own lessons. Therefore will I make this work, the honour of Jehovah, at least as perfect as I can make it by hallowing in its behalf the faltering of the dying lip and the clouding of the dying brain." "I must," says the dying hero, "spend the last sands in the glass in putting the glory of the Divine administration beyond all reach of reproach. Are my warriors and myself at one upon the doctrine that the whole of an inheritance promised is as good, to faith, as the whole of it conferred? Are we going to part agreed that Palestine is already as truly the property of the sons of Abraham as Timnath-Serah, in Mount Ephraim, belongs to me?" And so the good man could not rest in his grave till he had exchanged with his brethren in arms a new vow of allegiance to Him who has not, even in our day, with absolutely literal truth, accomplished the fulness of what is here taken as done. Here is faith for you! The captain of the army will not die till he has overleapt centuries by a faith of his own, and carried all his squadrons with him in the leap. One of our great warriors ordered his ships into action with the shout of "Victory, or Westminster Abbey!" But what should we have thought had the cry been "Victory *and* Westminster Abbey!" Joshua foresaw that his own death, and the death of whole generations of soldiers, would make no difference to the conquest of Canaan. Millenniums are shorter than moments to "him that believeth." This then was Joshua's judgment of the right business for a dying day. Beautiful ministry for last moments, to strengthen bystanders in their trust upon God's word. It was to Israel almost as if a spectre spoke. You contract heavy responsibilities—you who stand, from time to time, in the chambers of dying believers. Next to hearing voices from heaven comes the hearing of voices from those who are just stepping from earth. Books are nothing to the last whispers—even the last smiles—of warriors laying down their swords, and of pilgrims sinking into rest. I pray that we

may all die leaving some witness to the faithfulness of Christ. (*H. Christopherson.*) *Joshua's farewell charge:*—Notice, first, that in parting he says nothing of himself. He recalls to their minds only the source of all the power that was theirs in the past, and all the power that could be theirs in the future. His one thought in leaving them is to remind them of the character of God. That should ever be the thought of the pastor who is parting with his people—that he should say nothing of himself, or what he has done, or what, known only to himself and God perhaps, he has utterly failed to do, but that he should be exceeding anxious and exceeding jealous as to the character of God. The question which he seems to ask himself as he is about to leave them is not, "What will the people think about me when I am gone from them?" but, "What will this people think about God? Will they serve Him as if they really believed in their heart and in their soul that God can never fail them? Will they feel that they may, and that they must, because of all that they know of God in the past, trust Him absolutely and utterly for the future?" It is just possible he imagined that they might not, and so his endeavour is in parting to make this great truth of the absolute fidelity of God, which must be the foundation of all true religion, as strong in them as it could be. It is easy to say, of course, that God is true and faithful; but is there a man or woman here to-day who believes that every promise that God, in His written Word, or in revelation to their inmost and deepest spiritual nature, has made is actually fulfilled? What a changed world it would be if every baptized man and woman believed in their heart and soul, as a child believes the assurance of his father, that not one promise of God has ever failed! Joshua called them to witness that day that not one single promise that God had made them had failed; and yet there were the tribes that He had promised to drive out still occupying many places in the land; there was the Star unrisen yet that had been promised to come out of Jacob; there was the sceptre as yet unwielded by Israel; there were many things, if you read the history literally, that God had promised, and that, as far as mere human eye could see, were not accomplished; nay, the approach of their fulfilment was not discernible. And, nevertheless, he called on these men, who longed for these things, to whom these things had been promised and had not yet come, he calls them to bear witness that day that not one promise of the Lord their God had failed them. To his heart of faith and to his eye of faith, because God hath promised them, they were come to pass already; and he could not part from his people without endeavouring to make them as deeply persuaded of that truth as he was himself. And that, amid all the flux of time, that, amid all the great social, political, and economic changes that have swept over the world, that is the one foundation-truth still for nations and for men. In our national life it is the truth we mostly need. In our national life forces are being developed to-day into activity, of which none can at present forecast the issue. Beneath the smooth surface of our modern life fires are seething which reveal themselves now and again, as it were, in tongues of lurid flame that leap through the thin film of our civilisation. Now amid all this how can we look with anything like manly confidence to the remote, or even to the immediate, future? We must sink, as it seems to me, into despair, if we can only think of the schemes of rival politicians, or the impotence of social nostrums, or if we can only hear, as words of hope, the flabby platitudes of the feeble philanthropist. Our confidence and our hope must be based upon faith in the faithfulness of God, in Him as the eternal I Am, who sitteth above the water-floods, be the earth never so unquiet. Our cardinal faith must be that the Lord, who was God in all history, is God in history still, that He holds in His hands to-day all the strength and all the weakness of the nation and of man. He is not the God of the dead but of the living; and, if we will learn the lesson which He will be teaching us somehow, by prosperity or by disaster, even now, as we look around us on all the portents of the time, we may do so in the absolute confidence and in the faith and hope which we ought to possess as we say: "No one good thing which the Lord our God hath promised has ever failed us." (*Canon T. T. Shore.*) *What made Joshua the man he was?*—Joshua, when he spoke these words, was one of God's grand old friends. He and Caleb were the oldest men in that company. He tells them his experience of life. It is worth while to ask what made old Joshua the man he was. It was his character. If I met a man on the Manchester Exchange, and he told me he was building a new mill, fitting it up with the newest machinery, and that he would shortly turn out the finest yarn in the country, well, I would say to him: "You've got your work cut out, but we shall see." So I walk round that way, and look at the new mill, with its fine machinery; see the manager—one

who knows his business—and I say, "That's all right." Then I walk down to the mill gate to see what kind of raw material comes in. If the raw material is inferior, then the fine mill, with its machines, all goes for nothing—it won't do. The yarn won't wear. Now, make a man up of poor material, and he'll not wear. What character has a man; what is he made of? That is a great question. There are two things about Joshua's character to be noticed. I. JOSHUA BECAME THE MAN HE WAS BECAUSE HE KEPT COMPANY WITH ONE OLDER AND BETTER THAN HIMSELF. He was Moses' servant. Watching Moses and hearing his words moulded Joshua's character. My advice to young people is to keep company with folks older and better than yourselves. Why does God let people live to a long age, if not to give the younger generation their experience? Don't leave home in a hurry. If father and mother are people that pray, don't hurry to leave them. It is the same with old books: those used to be bound in sheepskin; nothing to look at outside, but all inside. Nowadays they put it all outside, and the bookbinder does what the author should have done. It is a responsibility which older people should consider, that they ought to live so as to attract the young. This is one of the wants of the age. Live so that your young people may say when they go out into life, "I leave my best friends behind." I never had such a fine compliment paid me before as I had from my boy the other day. It was in class, and when I came to my son Charlie, he said: "Well, father, I am only getting my eyes opened to see what a privilege mine has been to live with such people as you and mother are." I wouldn't give that away for £20,000. II. JOSHUA BECAME THE MAN HE WAS BECAUSE HE HAD THE COURAGE OF HIS CONVICTIONS. There were twelve of them sent to spy Canaan, ten of them said, "It's no use. The country is good enough, but it is full of giants." "Yes, we shall go up," said Joshua and Caleb. Joshua was willing to be out-voted. It was ten to two, but the ten had their coffins made before the two. Have the courage to vote for the right. One man and God makes a strong party. Joshua's experience was that God had been as good as His word. There are no crises but what God can surmount them. Go and ask George Müller. A man thought that he would give a thankoffering for his life being spared to fifty years. He intended to give £50, and he thought he would send the Bristol Orphanage £10. He was so haunted by this thought that he could not wait for his birthday, but got an envelope and despatched a cheque for £10. He got the usual receipt, and there was no more of it until the yearly report of the Orphanage appeared. He thought he would just turn up the date and see if his money were there. There at the very date he saw George Müller's words, "No money and no bread to-day, but cheque has arrived for £10." Friends, believe in a prayer-hearing God. Don't be afraid to leave your case in His hands if you are doing right. Some of these days you will have to say with Joshua, "I go the way of all the earth." You will have to give up going to business and to lie in bed. Everything is growing dim, and the loved voices seem miles away. Will some of those loved ones, writing to the son in Australia, have to say, "Father's last words were these: 'Not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord spake'"? (*T. Champness.*) *An elevation that explains the whole of life:*—The traveller who has reached the highest attainable summit of the Andes, and stands in the pure and cloudless atmosphere around them, can expatiate over a wide and almost boundless horizon; while another who remains in the valley below, amidst the haze of mist and vapour, must be satisfied with a comparatively poor and trifling view of the magnificence and beauty that surround him. It is thus with the Christian militant, in the warfare of his earthly state, and after his release to join the armies of the blessed in the rest of God. Here dimness and obscurity may in part intercept or much distort the prospect of Divine mercy, and all the rich consolations of a Saviour's love. But when his liberated soul shall attain the felicities of heaven, he will stand upon an elevation commanding the boundless extent of Divine operation in the walk and world of providence and grace. His eye will be strengthened to behold, and his comprehension will be enlarged to understand them with knowledge, love, and wonder, increasing throughout eternity. No cloud will be seen throughout the universe of blessedness to intercept his vision. Every dispensation by which the Saviour visited and helped him, however misunderstood in the days of earthly darkness and ignorance, will then be fully explained, every difficulty solved, and every apparent contradiction harmonised for ever. (*R. P. Buddicom, M.A.*) *The promise of God has its season:*—As the herbs and flowers which sleep all winter in their roots underground, when the time of spring approacheth presently start forth of their beds, where they had lain so long unperceived, thus will the

promise in its season do. He delays who passeth the time appointed; but he only stays that waits for the appointed time, and then comes. Every promise is dated, but with a mysterious character; and for want of skill in God's chronology we are prone to think that God forgets us, when indeed we forget ourselves in being so bold to set God a time of our own, and in being angry that He comes not just then to us. *Confidence in God's faithfulness*:—Your boy comes to you and asks you to buy him a fishing-rod, and he says, "I saw one to-day in a window, which was just what I want. Can't I go down now and buy it?" And you say, "No, not to-day, wait a little." A week passes, and the lad begins to say to himself, "I wonder if father has forgotten all about it?" Then you put into his hands a better rod than he has ever seen before, and the boy is overwhelmed with surprise and pleasure. And yet the main thing in all this is not that your son received what he wanted, but the gift won, through delay, has given him a new view of his father's wisdom, and a new confidence in his affection, which makes him say, "Hereafter, when I want anything of this kind, I will leave it all to father." And so the main thing that a man gains, when God at last answers his prayer, is not the gift, but the clearer consciousness that God is better than His gifts, that he has all in God. (*R. Vincent.*)

CHAPTER XXIV.

VERS. 1–33. Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem.—*Joshua's last farewell*:—I. GOD'S THREEFOLD MERCIES. 1. Israel's enlargement (vers. 2–4). 2. Israel's exodus (vers. 5–7). 3. Israel's entrance into Canaan (vers. 8–12). II. JOSHUA'S THREEFOLD APPEAL. 1. He exhorts them to fear and serve this great and this good God. 2. To manifest in yet clearer light that the service of God is a reasonable service, and to show the utter folly of idolatry, Joshua, in the gravest irony, upholds the alternative for the adoption of the people, and mocks the apostasy, the latent germs of which he knew too well were in the hearts of the great assembly before him. 3. Then, having, both with tender love and with withering scorn, set forth the two alternatives, he declares his own resolute decision in words which should be the motto for every ruler, and for every householder. This is the true order of the growth of piety. First, individual consecration; then follows family control; and then the third stage in the gradation—namely, public influence—will not be lacking. III. ISRAEL'S THREEFOLD COVENANT. IV. A THREEFOLD AFFIDAVIT TO ISRAEL'S COVENANT. 1. The first is the memory of the transaction in the minds of the people themselves. 2. Joshua himself, moreover, puts the whole matter into writing, even as we have it here before us in this last chapter. 3. But there is another testimony that shall witness against Israel if they apostatise—"a great stone," which he places beneath the oak in Shechem, "that was by the sanctuary of the Lord." V. A THREEFOLD SEAL TO GOD'S PROMISES. The Book closes with the mention of three burials. In the peaceful graves of three of God's saints we seem to see three seals to the truth of God's Word. These holy men once served Him among strange nations, but now their bones are laid within the borders of the promised land. (*G. W. Butler, M.A.*) *Joshua's last appeal*:—It was at Shechem that Joshua's last meeting with the people took place. There was much to recommend that place. It lay a few miles to the north-west of Shiloh, and was not only distinguished as Abraham's first resting-place in the country, and the scene of the earliest of the promises given in it to him; but likewise as the place where, between Mount Ebal and Gerizim, the blessings and curses of the law had been read out soon after Joshua entered the land, and the solemn assent of the people given to them. And whereas it is said (ver. 26) that the great stone set up as a witness was "by the sanctuary of the Lord," this stone may have been placed at Shiloh after the meeting, because there it would be more fully in the observation of the people as they came up to the annual festivals (1 Sam. i. 7, 9). 1. In the record of Joshua's speech contained in the twenty-fourth chapter, he begins by rehearsing the history of the nation. He has an excellent reason for beginning with the revered name of Abraham, because Abraham had been conspicuous for that very grace, loyalty to Jehovah, which he is bent on impressing on them. We mark in this rehearsal the well-known features of the national history, as they were always represented; the frank recognition of the supernatural, with no indication

of myth or legend, with nothing of the mist or glamour in which the legend is commonly enveloped. And, seeing that God hath done all this for them, the inference was that He was entitled to their heartiest loyalty and obedience. Never was a good man more in earnest, or more thoroughly persuaded that all that made for a nation's welfare was involved in the course which he pressed upon them. 2. But Joshua did not urge this merely on the strength of his own conviction. He must enlist their reason on his side; and for this cause he now called on them deliberately to weigh the claims of other gods and the advantages of other modes of worship, and choose that which must be pronounced the best. There were four claimants to be considered—(1) Jehovah; (2) the Chaldæan gods worshipped by their ancestors; (3) the gods of the Egyptians; and (4) the gods of the Amorites among whom they dwelt. Make your choice between these, said Joshua, if you are dissatisfied with Jehovah. But could there be any reasonable choice between these gods and Jehovah? It is often useful, when we hesitate as to a course, to set down the various reasons for and against—it may be the reasons of our judgment against the reasons of our feelings; for often this course enables us to see how utterly the one outweighs the other. May it not be useful for us to do as Joshua urged Israel to do? 3. But Joshua is fully prepared to add example to precept. Whatever you do in this matter, my mind is made up, my course is clear—"as for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah." He was happy in being able to associate his house with himself as sharing his convictions and his purpose. He owed this, in all likelihood, to his own firm and intrepid attitude throughout his life. His house saw how consistently and constantly he recognised the supreme claims of Jehovah. Not less clearly did they see how constantly he experienced the blessedness of his choice. 4. Convinced by his arguments, moved by his eloquence, and carried along by the magnetism of his example, the people respond with enthusiasm. But Joshua knew something of their fickle temper. He may have called to mind the extraordinary enthusiasm of their fathers when the tabernacle was in preparation; the singular readiness with which they had contributed their most valued treasures, and the grievous change they underwent after the return of the spies. Even an enthusiastic burst like this is not to be trusted. He must go deeper; he must try to induce them to think more earnestly of the matter, and not trust to the feeling of the moment. 5. Hence he draws a somewhat dark picture of Jehovah's character. He dwells on those attributes which are least agreeable to the natural man—His holiness, His jealousy, and His inexorable opposition to sin. "Ye cannot serve the Lord," said Joshua; "take care how you undertake what is beyond your strength." Perhaps he wished to impress on them the need of Divine strength for so difficult a duty. Certainly he did not change their purpose, but only drew from them a more resolute expression. 6. And now Joshua comes to a point which had doubtless been in his mind all the time, but which he had been waiting for a favourable opportunity to bring forward. He had pledged the people to an absolute and unreserved service of God, and now he demands a practical proof of their sincerity. He knows quite well that they have "strange gods" among them. Minor forms of idolatry, minor recognitions of the gods of the Chaldæans and the Egyptians and the Amorites, were prevalent even yet. What a weed sin is, and how it is for ever reappearing! And reappearing among ourselves too, in a different variety, but essentially the same. For what honest and earnest heart does not feel that there are idols and images among ourselves that interfere with God's claims and God's glory as much as the teraphim and the earrings of the Israelites did? 7. And now comes the closing and the clinching transaction of this meeting at Shechem. Joshua enters into a formal covenant with the people. When Joshua got the people bound by a transaction of this sort, he seemed to obtain a new guarantee for their fidelity; a new barrier was erected against their lapsing into idolatry. And yet it was but a temporary barrier against a flood which seemed ever to be gathering strength unseen, and preparing for another fierce discharge of its disastrous waters. 8. At the least, this meeting secured for Joshua a peaceful sunset, and enabled him to sing his "Nunc dimittis." The evil which he dreaded most was not at work as the current of life ebbed away from him; it was his great privilege to look round him and see his people faithful to their God. It does not appear that Joshua had any very comprehensive or far-reaching aims with reference to the moral training and development of the people. His idea of religion seems to have been a very simple loyalty to Jehovah, in opposition to the perversions of idolatry. For his absolute and supreme loyalty to his Lord he is entitled to our highest reverence. This loyalty is a rare virtue, in the sublime

proportions in which it appeared in him. The very rareness, the eccentricity of the character, secures a respectful homage. And yet who can deny that it is the true representation of what every man should be who says, "I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth"? (*W. G. Blaikie, D.D.*)

Dying charges:—The world long remembers Jonathan Edwards's dying charge to his family: "Trust in God, and you have nothing to fear"; or the English Samuel Johnson's exhortation to his physician, "Doctor, believe a dying man: nothing but salvation by Christ can comfort you when you come to lie here"; or a departing President, like Jackson, saying, "Religion is a great reality: the Bible is true." These and a thousand other instances testify that a thoughtful man going the way of all the earth is pretty certain to have his thoughts fixed on the place to which he is going and the preparation he and those around him may need for that journey. (*W. E. Knox, D.D.*)

Ver. 4. **I gave unto Isaac Jacob and Esau: and I gave unto Esau mount Seir.**—*Certain singular subjects:*—I. HISTORY AND THE HAND OF GOD IN IT. See: "I gave"; and then again, "I gave." It is not merely that Esau and Jacob were born of Isaac and Rebekah, but the Lord says, "I gave unto Isaac Jacob and Esau." How plainly doth this declare that the hand of God is in human history! At first sight history seems a great tangle, a confusion; but on looking at it more closely we perceive that it is only in appearance a maze, but in fact a marvellous piece of arrangement, exhibiting perfect precision and never-failing accuracy. 1. We see the hand of God in history very strikingly in the raising up of remarkable men at certain special periods. "I gave unto Isaac Jacob and Esau": children are the gift of God. This is true not only of Isaac but of all mortal men. God gave to a worthy couple, George Washington; to another pair, John Howard; and to a third, George Whitefield. Each of these, in his own special way, was a Divine gift to men. Children are born with different talents and varied capacities, but all about them which will make them blessings is the gift of God. 2. So also is the hand of God distinctly to be seen in all great events. If Esau captures Mount Seir, then the setting up of the Edomite dominion, bad as it may have been, is from another point of view a matter in which God's purpose and design are to be noted, for He says: "I gave Esau mount Seir." In everything that happens, be it small or great, the Lord is present, and His will is done. It is so in all the plottings and manœuvrings of kings and princes and senates, in the stirs of public opinion, in the marchings of armies, and in all that transpires among mortal men. Though the iniquity of man is seen abundantly, yet the overruling power of God is never absent. 3. To us the hand of God is very visible in our own case. Look at the hand of God that gave to you and to me such parents as we have: I mean those of us who have the great delight of having descended from Christian men and women. Had we anything to do with that? And yet the greatest part of a man's future depends upon the parents of whom he is born. Is not the hand of God in it? 4. And do we not see the hand of God, again, in our children? Bring these gifts of God to God, and say, "Here, Lord, are the children which Thou hast given me. O Lord, let Thy name be named on them, and let Thy grace be glorified in them." 5. Observe, further, that the Lord's hand is in all the prosperity which He gives to any. He says, "I gave unto Esau mount Seir, to possess it." It is by God's allotment that temporal things fall as they do: even the ungodly have their portion in this life by Divine grant. 6. And, once more, God's hand is to be seen in the place in which we live. If Esau lives in Mount Seir, it is because God appoints him to be there; and if Israel goes down to Egypt, it is for the selfsame reason. If you and I remove from one place to another, it is sweet to see the cloud moving before us, and to know that the Lord directs our way. II. BIRTH AND ITS DISAPPOINTMENTS. "I gave unto Isaac Jacob and Esau," twin children born of godly parents. In that birth there was joy, but sorrow came by it as well as joy. Children are certain cares and doubtful comforts. They may bring to their parents such sorrow that they may be inclined to think the barren happier than the fruitful. Hence it is well for us to leave our hopes of posterity with God; and if we reckon that in a childless house we have missed a great joy, we ought also to reckon that we have missed a mint of trouble by the same fact. III. WORLDLINGS AND THEIR POSSESSIONS. Why does God so often give possessions to ungodly men? Why do they flourish? Why do they have their portion in this life? Is it not, first, because God thinks little of these things, and therefore gives them to those of whom He thinks little? "Why," said Luther in his day, "the whole Turkish

empire is but a basket of husks that God gives to the hogs, and therefore He hands it over to the unbelievers." Something infinitely better is reserved for the Lord's own family. The rich blessing of true grace He reserves for His children and heirs. Do you wish that ungodly men should have less? For my part, I am reconciled to their present prosperity, for it is all they ever will have. Poor souls, let them have as much of it as they may here; they have nothing hereafter. Let those have the treasures of this present evil world who have nothing else. Never quarrel with the Lord for saying, "I gave unto Esau mount Seir, to possess it." Besides, these comforts may lead them to reflect upon God's bounty to them; and at any rate they ought to move them to repentance. IV. THE CHOSEN OF GOD AND THEIR TRIALS. Esau reigns, but Israel serves; Esau set his nest on high, but Israel crouched by the reeds of the river. The worldling would read the Scripture as if it said, "As many as I love, I caress and pamper"; but the Lord speaketh not so; His word is, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten"; "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." To carnal reason this seems strange; faith alone can explain it. 1. Israel and his children went down into Egypt, first, for their preservation. Sanctified afflictions are spiritual promotions. The salt and bitterness of sorrow often preserves men from the gall and bitterness of sin. 2. They went down into Egypt, next, for their improvement. God often thrusts His people into adversity that He may improve them, arouse them, instruct them, and ennoble them. See to it, that the Lord's design be fulfilled in you to the full. May the fire and the file, the crucible and the flame, work in you a clearance of dross and rust, and make you pure and bright. 3. They also went down into Egypt for their education. The chosen seed needed teaching; they were getting to be rustic, not to say barbarous, in their manners; acquirements and knowledge were scant among them. They must go down into the seat of ancient learning to acquire arts and sciences and civilisation. For future usefulness it is well that we bear present sorrow, and like Jacob go down into Egypt. 4. And they went down to Egypt, again, that God might display His great power in them. It is worth while to go down into Egypt to come out of it with a high hand and an outstretched arm. Oh, the glory of the Lord in His redeemed! Oh, the lofty destiny of the tried people of God! Oh, the sublimity of their lives even now! There is God in them; there is God about them. "Jacob and his children went down into Egypt." That is where the story ends, according to my text; but you know the story does not end there after all; for out of Jacob and his children came the Star, the Sceptre, and the Throne. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 12. **Not with thy sword, nor with thy bow.**—*Not with sword or bow:*—A very necessary reminder, applicable to both the hour of conflict and victory. Both seasons have their own dangers. There is no final conflict or victory in this life; only when death has finished our course should we be hopeless or exultant. Each contest is but a single event of a series, and the one, though leading to others, does not of necessity determine the character of them all. Defeat to-day does not mean defeat to-morrow, any more than success to-day means the same in the next encounter with the hidden powers of darkness. No man is safe on this side the grave. So for each, for all, these words may be for encouragement and direction. The cause of failure may be discovered, and the remedy be pointed out, or the way which shall lead to entire possession of the fulness of God's blessedness may be known, as each and all shall remember that "it is not by thy sword or thy bow." I. LIFE'S CONFLICT MUST BE MET BY HUMAN EFFORT AND ENERGY. The promise of the land as an inheritance to the people of Israel is most distinct. Everywhere God said He would give it. Was there not some reason, then, in the expectation that they should have the land without any very special trouble? Is there so much to be wondered at in the disappointment of the spies when they saw they had to fight? One would have thought that the people would have walked in at one side while the inhabitants walked out at the other. God could have done it without the intervention of human effort at all. But this is not the point. What God did, as we learn from the history of this period, was, He used the sword and the bow of the people to secure to them the promise He had given to their fathers. And though no such stipulation is anywhere directly stated, yet universally we find that the human effort and skill are needful to the attainment of the gift of God. And it is just so with all that has to do with God. He has endowed us with certain powers which He calls upon us to exercise. When, then, on the one hand we sit down quietly and say, "God has promised and will perform—there is

nothing for me to do," or when we refuse to do anything because of our great weakness, or when we fail to call upon our powers of mind and heart to rise against the inroads of our spiritual enemies, or quietly submit when we are taken captive in the snares of the devil, we are just putting ourselves outside the pale of the directions which God has given us. So, too, when we ask God to work for us, and make supplication to Him to remove trouble or give us light and peace, if we say, "God can and will work," and we do nothing ourselves, then we are forgetting this part of God's ways. It is not by longing, wishing, desiring, however ardent, that God fulfils His loving purposes towards us; but by prayer, girding up our minds, and resolute, undaunted courage, that we must meet our foe—"with thy sword and with thy bow." But what is the energy and activity here indicated? You will observe that God has not endowed man with any natural modes of offence or defence. The smallest insect is apparently better equipped for the dangers of its life than we are. But God has given man a stronger force than all. Will—moral force—the power of doing—are his; so that though unarmed he is more fully equipped against the multifarious dangers of his way. Nothing can assault him, but he can adopt such means as shall protect—such measures as shall totally defeat the foe. He has the sword and the bow. Moral dangers must be met by moral means, *e.g.*, conscience must be kept clear, its voice must be listened to, and when heard the will must without hesitation obey. Spiritual blessings must be obtained by spiritual effort. God has promised them, He will give; but you must overcome the obstacles. Will you have the promise? then adopt the means needful. If you would scale the mountains, you look for a guide, and take provisions, and put on suitable dress. "Put on the whole armour of God." Just as the poor shipwrecked one lays hold of the floating spar for very life, so you must lay hold of God, and laying hold of Him, do what He tells you. Cannot! No such word ought to be used. "I can, I will!" these are your sword and bow, and if you would extract blessing out of everything it must be by their use, and only thus will you gain the end you desire. But then it must be "thy" sword and "thy" bow. There is a speciality here. It is the act of the individual, the perseverance of the man. II. LIFE'S CONFLICT IS NOT WON BY THE HUMAN EFFORT AND ENERGY. The greatest effort cannot obtain the victory; the most stupendous energy cannot save from defeat. It is one thing to meet the foe, it is another thing to win the day. And so our text tells us that it is not by thy sword nor by thy bow. You must fight, but God gives the victory. It is not won by your fighting, but by God's aid. It is not secured by your prowess, but by God's strength. It is all God, not you. (*H. W. Butcher.*)

Ver. 13. **And I have given you a land for which ye did not labour.**—*The inheritance of the past:*—The substance of these closing words of the old Hebrew chief amounted to this: they had had vastly more done for them than they had done or could have done for themselves. They were not the sole nor the chief architects of their own fortunes. At this stage in the fortunes of their national life the prescient eye of Joshua saw the resulting perils from the disposition among them to forget their past history and to magnify the personal element in their present gains and security. There is but one step between the temper of boastfulness and the decadence and demoralisation of a nation's life. Modesty, simplicity, self-knowledge, and a devout recognition of its profound indebtedness to the past—these are among the prime elements of national wealth and prosperity. And Joshua's was that warning voice whose authority and experience and disinterested patriotism, as with all similar men in all countries and times, served as the organ of the national conscience. It served to remind them that a nation is not the growth of a day, that the highest blessings of life are unattainable by our own unaided efforts, that manifold are the forces which are working in the world to produce the life of each one of us, and that it is as inaccurate as it is ungrateful and boastful to impute to ourselves the chief or the largest share in the production of all the good of life that we enjoy. "I have given you a land for which ye did not labour." To every age and period, as it reviews its successes and takes stock of its gains and advances, may be addressed these words of Joshua, with deep truth and significance. The conditions of life amid which we live to-day constitute veritably the promised land of the many generations of English and Scottish life that have preceded us. In whatever way we turn we have much to make us grateful for our progress, and to inspire us with a deep sense of that providence whose guiding spirit is a fact as real and sacred of British history as

ever it was of Hebrew history. In regard to the political and social troubles of the present—and they are both many and serious—and in regard to the conditions of our human life to-day, whose frequent difficulty and harshness sometimes makes us fretful and discontented, I do not know anything which better tends to smooth out these wrinkles of impatient discontent, and to inspire us with a feeling of our large and solid improvement in life, than to take up, for example, the history of our own country, say some three or four centuries ago, and fixing your reading and your attention mainly upon the social condition of the people; upon the state of our commerce and all the peaceful arts; upon the measure of personal freedom in matters of State or of religion which was then possessed; upon the character of the public health and the amount of disease and the averages of mortality in all ranks; upon the degree of comfort which people had in their dwelling-houses; upon the general level of morality and decency which the habits of society evinced—to contrast all this with what requires no special course of reading, the public and private life of society to-day in our land, its means of intelligence, its measure of liberty, and all the other distinguishing qualities of our civilisation to-day. Civilisation, in which word is comprehended art and science and religion, and refinement of manner and speech, and the increase of material comfort, and the spread of intelligence, and all things which beautify or sanctify our human life and character, is no mere production of some one age or country to which now and then some little measure of improvement is added at irregular and incalculable intervals, but is the long, unbroken movement of ascensional life going right back in its origins, into the dim, impenetrable beginnings of human life and society. What is the utmost that we to-day have done or can do set against the mighty sum of the world's historical and prehistorical life! We find the sense of enormous indebtedness in regard, for example, to our religious possessions. The text reminds us of how that thousands of years ago an Eastern people were feeling their way to religious truths and ideas which, passing subsequently through the higher medium and expression of Christianity, absolutely rule a vast part of the world's life to-day. We are debtors both to the barbarian and the Greek, to the Gentile and to the Jew. In regard to the more restricted life of our own country and nation, we are the sum and product of a large variety and infusion of forces. And in the social order of our life there are few of us who need to be reminded of how much that controls our lives to-day dates back to the far and almost-forgotten past. Our constitutional liberties have been things of slow accretion. And again, in the shape and character of our strictly personal life it is no less true that we have entered upon possessions for which we did not labour. There is one inheritance at least which is every man's birthright, the accumulated experience of his race and ancestry. The life, the conduct, the temper, the traditions of our ancestry live in us. When we speak of a man as coming from a good stock or a bad stock the phrase is significant of how considerable is that element of character and tendency for which we did not labour. We are not altogether the children of a day. We have taken a good many centuries in making. Let me urge upon you the duty which these considerations bring before us of maintaining an intelligent sympathy with the past, as an essential condition of rightly understanding and controlling the present. It is by liberally using the vast stores of accumulated experience that we have inherited; it is by tracking our social troubles to their roots in antecedent conditions; it is by following the line of dogmatic and Church history to the periods of germination and birth, that we shall be the most effectively armed to meet the difficulties and to discharge the duties which every generation has, in God's name, to manfully overcome or fulfil. Let us not shrink from them. Again, these considerations suggest to us the virtue and grace of humility. "I have given you a land for which ye did not labour." "We are not our own," wrote the apostle; "we have been bought with a price." We are ourselves but the last link in the interminable procession of the human race. The true lesson of history and of religion is to make us feel how slight and insignificant is our best work in comparison with the mighty whole. It is to inspire us with the salutary and humbling feeling that our life is being guided by an infinite power and wisdom, who can dispense with any one of us, but who is indispensable to us. And once more: these considerations should guide us in our duties as regards that unknown future which is ever lying in front of us. What we shall be is being determined by what we are to-day. What the national life will be a century hence is, in no small measure, dependent upon the quality and policy of the national life to-day. Labour, then, in modest, self-forgetting devotion to the will of God and His

abiding truths, so that the future of the world's life may be happier and wiser and purer for our lives. Labour as men who, by the most absolute of necessities, will have to give an account of their stewardship of life. Finally, take stock of your own lives, of all that you have passed through, of all the blessings that have crowned your days, of the perils from which you have escaped, of the temptations you have resisted, of the vast stores of life in which you have found your noblest nutriment; and say how much of it originated in your own independent resources and volitions, and how much of it came from sources far above and beyond any power of yours. (*J. Vickery.*)

Vers. 14–29. **Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve Him.**—*The last days of Joshua*:—I. THE REASONABLENESS OF SERVING GOD (vers. 14, 15). To serve God, to obey Him, to love Him, to submit heart and life to His control, is only a seemly and adequate acknowledgment of claims felt to be just. God's character, His mercy, His grace in the gospel, His promises of pardon, the gift of eternal life through His Son, create an obligation which, if it be disregarded, makes our attitude towards God not only sinful, but unreasonable. It is inconsistent with all in us that is true and noble and manly. This is the paradox of sin: it makes one conscious of placing an inferior good above the superior, of seeking for dross and refusing the gold, of plucking a bauble and rejecting the crown. II. THE STATE OF MIND REQUIRED FOR THE SERVICE OF GOD (vers. 19, 20.) The service of God must be born of something more than impulse. It must be the result of choice; it must be the determined purpose of the whole being to enter and continue in a life of obedience. To every one God is saying, "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve." Many desire to be Christians, they wish they were the servants of God, but they are unwilling to "choose" to become such. If for a time they set their faces heavenward, they soon turn back. When they sink in the Slough of Despond, they struggle to be free on the side nearest the City of Destruction. Such need to remember that, when the service of God is entered, the will is to be unalterably set towards Him. III. THE RIGHT ATTITUDE FOR THOSE WHO PROPOSE TO SERVE GOD. "Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God," &c. Joshua well understood the benefit arising from such a formal enactment. 1. It would be a test of the strength of their purpose. Often the way to disclose the feebleness of one's Christian aims is to bring them to the test of an open declaration—to ask, "Are you willing that others should know, that all should know, that you commit yourself unqualifiedly to be the Lord's?" 2. It would be helpful by bringing to their aid the motive of consistency. Most men desire to act in harmony with their past record. IV. THE VALUE OF A SINGLE LIFE DEVOTED TO THE SERVICE OF GOD. Joshua's days are now ended. His work is done, and he is ready for his reward. Few men have lived so worthily. Men are needed everywhere of like decision, and who are ready to thus openly declare for God. Will you be one? (*Sermons by the Monday Club.*) *Joshua, and his zeal for the service of the Lord*:—This was a great event, and we ought to know the secret of its causes. It was, we see, this old man Joshua's burning, quenchless zeal for the service of the Lord, kindled full five and sixty years before. It led to results worthy to rank with the revival under Ezra, with the Pentecost at Jerusalem and at Cæsarea, with the conversion of Roman emperors and British islanders to Christianity, with the Reformation and the triumphs of Wesley and Whitfield. I. ZEAL FOR THE SERVICE OF GOD IS BORN OF VIEWS WHICH ARE TAKEN OF GOD. This plainly was the case with Joshua; this was the case with the people also, and universally this must be true. We are asked to view God as creation presents Him (Psa. xix.). This has, at least, the merit of being poetry of the highest school; it is a thousand pities if it is not true. Oh, does not this vast fabric suggest a God? Perhaps not; but we have got the suggestion somehow, and to our anxious inquiries of her all nature seems to give back a ready affirmative response. We are asked to view God as He is presented to us in the phenomena of mind. One observes that these mental phenomena taper away downwards to the tiniest forms of sentient life. One feels that somehow it must and does, in a corresponding manner, expand in its upward way, and when we have reached the loftiest heights of the finite we seem to come in sight of the lowest rays of light from the throne of the Infinite mind. Then if the Lord our God is one Lord, there will be a concentration of thought on Him; our love will be undivided, rising to suitable proportions to its Infinite object. We are asked to see God in His providence. This is a name we give to a constantly-observed work resulting from an unseen Presence. We notice the perpetual

operation of certain great forces in nature, which say nothing so distinctly as they say that they are only the expressions of an all-comprehending and sufficient Power behind them. Can we connect this governing power with that all-pervading mind, and with the creating power of which we have spoken? Yes, I am sure of it. There are unattached threads in all. They evidently find their complements in one another. Then if this is the "God of my life, throughout my days my grateful powers shall sound His praise, my song shall wake with opening light, and cheer the dark and silent night." But all these are summed up and expressed by the Incarnation. You are asked to view God in Christ. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son hath declared Him." It is when we view God thus that our zeal for His service will rise and abound; will flow forth and overflow. "Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small, love so amazing, so Divine," demands a house of prayer, a noble service, Christian toil, more than we can give, or think to give. II. ZEAL FOR GOD'S SERVICE IS NOURISHED BY THE VIEWS WHICH WE CHERISH CONCERNING THE CHARACTER OF THAT SERVICE. Our experience and our observation are faithful witnesses hereto. Joshua presents a severe but accurate view of God's holiness, and then urges a service that shall perfectly accord with it—a service that was pure, and sincere, and true, and grateful. "Serve the Lord," said he, "in sincerity and truth." "It must," he meant to say, "be service of the heart rather than of the hands." A service which demands the heart nourishes the zeal born of right conceptions of Jehovah. This is living bread, this is water of life. Our God searcheth the heart, but we are not afraid, we are the more confident. The sacrifices He desires are the broken heart, the contrite spirit (Isa. lxvi. 1–5). But outwardly and visibly it must be pure, as inwardly it was sincere and true. The oldest forms of God's service were wealthy in sacrifice, and prayers, and Divine blessing. David, the Homer, the Virgil, the Milton of the Hebrews, enriched that service by adding psalmody and music. Later times added the stated reading of the Scriptures, and later still we have the sacraments and the proclamation of the gospel. Of our Christian ritual, then, we boldly say that it supplies us with the green pastures and still waters of God's Word. It has the spread table of heaven's bounties, if not dainties. It anoints the devout worshipper with a holy oil, and gives him an overflowing cup. It is the expression of the goodness and mercy which follow every step of the pilgrim, making him glad to dwell in the house of the Lord for ever. III. JOSHUA'S ENTHUSIASM WAS PERFECTED BY HIS CONVICTION OF THE INFLUENCE WHICH THE WORSHIP OF GOD EXERTS ON MEN. To tell the history of its influence on individuals is to tell the story of every worthy instance of personal piety. You may seek for them and you will find them among all ranks and kindreds. You may scan the calendar of your own history, and its red-letter days are those you have spent in the service of God. To tell its influence on families would be to write the history of the best of earth's households and homes from tent to palace. To these God has kept covenant and showed mercy to the fourth generation. What a heritage of mercy! Let us in our families see to it that the legacy never runs out. Let the men of the fourth generation in this descent remember what they ought to do. But how shall we tell its historic influence on the nation? It has supplied the place of navies; invincible armadas have been scattered as forest leaves before it. It has been better than armies, than revenue, than police. (*G. Woolnough.*) **In sincerity and in truth.**—*Marks of being sincerely religious:*—Sincerity is the disposition of soul which alone can recommend us to God, and incline Him to look with an eye of mercy upon the errors and frailties of our conduct. I. If we would know whether we serve God in sincerity, LET US LOOK WITH AN ATTENTIVE EYE INTO OUR HEARTS, in order to trace the true springs or principles of our actions. II. Another evidence of our serving God in sincerity is, WHEN WE ARE AS CAREFUL TO PRESERVE A GOOD CONSCIENCE AS TO SAVE APPEARANCES, and act with the same integrity in secret, where God is the sole spectator of our actions, as when they lie open to the view and observation of the world. III. Another evidence of our serving God in sincerity and in truth is, WHEN WE PAY AN EQUAL REGARD TO THE WHOLE LAW, and mean not, by selecting some favourite duties, to compensate for the habitual violation or neglect of others that happen not to fall in with our taste and inclination. IV. Another evidence of our serving God in sincerity is, WHEN WE RESIST AND OVERCOME TEMPTATIONS; for to serve God in those instances only where we are not tempted to disobey is a very defective test of our integrity. The decisive proof is, when we are faithful to our duty in opposition to seducements, and reject every solicitation that offers to corrupt us. V. The last evidence I shall

mention of our serving God in sincerity is, IF, IN CASES WHERE WE ARE DOUBTFUL OF THE OBLIGATION OR LAWFULNESS OF AN ACTION, WE ALWAYS INCLINE TO DO WHAT APPEARS MOST CONFORMABLE TO DUTY, what will best answer the ends of piety, and be most conducive to the honour of religion. (*G. Carr, B.A.*) **Put away the gods which your fathers served.**—*An address to image-worshippers:*—Here is a forcible address to every image-worshipper, and, indeed, every image-possessor: "Put away these gods from you." What have any who own the Bible for their guide to do with these vain and worthless toys of sin, these devices of Satan, and degrading productions of ignorance, the very perversions of reason, as well as the corruptions of revelation? They are everywhere the contempt and derision of inspired truth. To make them is directly prohibited, and to destroy them explicitly commanded, so that it may be matter of wonder how any can plead for their use, under any plausibility or pretence, as remembrancers only of spiritual and hidden realities. If in the Church of the Old Testament the very mention of idols, or the keeping any representations of them, became so offensive in the Divine eye, what shall be said of any rivalship in the heart in services and worship offered to saints or angels? Supplications and sacrifices, offered even to holy intelligences, must be idolatry in its spirit, equally offensive to God and opposed to His Word as the most degrading rites of the heathen. Oh, what false gods, what spiritual imagery is formed within the chambers of the heart! Who does not need to put them away, and to cleanse himself from the filthiness of flesh and spirit! How easily does carnal affection change the best of things into the worst! There is nothing but, through the corruption of imagination or sinfulness of affection, may become an idol of the heart. Whatever denies to God supremacy of love, and occupies the regards to be paid to spiritual and eternal realities, that is an idol to be put away; and happy are such who can say, "What have I to do any more with idols?" Choice enters into the very nature of true and sincere religion, so that none serve the Lord cheerfully, acceptably, and with profit, whose heart is not itself a willing offering. (*W. Seaton.*)

Ver. 15. **Choose you this day whom ye will serve.**—*The Christian's choice:*—"Seem evil unto you to serve the Lord!" How can the service of the Lord seem evil to any one who is not either wholly void of understanding or altogether hardened against religious impressions? The service of God is exclusive. It does not admit of interference, or of competition, or of divided homage. It must have the whole man. He requires your whole heart—with all its principles, and dispositions, and sensibilities. And if your heart be thus surrendered to Him, the conduct, which is but a demonstration of its influence and actings, will exhibit, in all its departments and in all its bearings a single regard to His will and glory. Now, apply this test to yourselves. It is no doubt a strict and searching one. But it is scriptural and true. I. CHOOSE you whom you will serve—the Lord, or those idols which an evil heart of unbelief has substituted in His place. You may allege that it does not seem evil to you to serve the Lord. And, speculatively, this may be true; but, practically, it is false. You think, you feel, you act, as if it did seem evil unto you to serve the Lord. There is a latent repugnance in your minds to His service. There is a real devotedness to those whom you ought not to serve which is essentially and irreconcilably inconsistent with a real devotedness to Him whom you ought to serve. And the idea that you are submitting to His sway, when you are, in fact, their slaves, merely because you reject the atrocious saying, that it is "evil to serve the Lord," and are not disinclined to do many things included in that service, is all a delusion, which, however long it may last in this land of self-deception and shadows, must inevitably be broken. Now, it is our wish that this delusion, so sad and so fatal, under which you labour, should be broken before the day of retribution comes. You have been "halting between two opinions"; embrace one of them and abide by it. You have been trying to amalgamate two systems: abandon the one, and cleave to the other. II. "Choose you THIS DAY whom ye will serve." Having acknowledged that you have been in error—grievous, perilous error—why should you delay forsaking it? Is not this to belie your own professed convictions? "Choose you this day whom ye will serve"; and instead of hesitating, as if you might still snatch another pleasure before you renounce your connection with the world, account the time past as far more than sufficient to have wrought the will of the flesh. Wonder at the forbearance of God in not making you long since a monument of His righteous anger against the unholy and impenitent. "Choose you this day whom ye will serve";

because the sooner that you enter on God's service, in its full import, the sooner will you consult the dignity of that rational nature which He has given you, and which you have been hitherto degrading. "Choose you this day whom ye will serve"; because to delay the change which a right choice implies will be the means of rendering it more difficult in the end. "Choose you this day whom ye will serve"; for if you do not embrace the existing opportunity of devoting yourselves wholly and heartily to God, which is your reasonable and bounden service, another opportunity may never be afforded. (*A. Thomson, D.D.*) *Promptitude of choice recommended*:—I. THE ACT OF CHOICE. 1. Our choice should be Divine in its object. We should choose the Lord for our God. 2. Our choice should be rational in its character. Let us wisely consider what we are doing. 3. Our choice should be decisive in its nature. 4. Our choice should be practical in its operations. Having chosen God, serve Him—(1) Totally; (2) uniformly; (3) evidently. II. THE PERIOD OF CHOICE. 1. We should make our choice this day, because of the criminal neglect of which we have been guilty. 2. From a view of the shortness and uncertainty of our time. 3. Because the present is the only time when God has promised the aid of His Spirit. 4. Because the difficulty of choosing will increase in proportion to our neglect of it. III. THE MOTIVES FOR CHOICE. 1. The capacity which we have for choice is a reason for its exercise. God gives nothing in vain. 2. The perilous state in which we are without this choice is another motive. 3. The happiness that results from our choosing God should prompt us to comply with the requisition in the text. He who has chosen God is in a state of safety and tranquillity. (*Sketches of Sermons.*) *Religion voluntary, personal, powerful*:—I. RELIGION IS VOLUNTARY. 1. The choice, however, is not between religion and no religion. Man is a religious being. Religion is as necessary to his soul as breathing is to his body. To be religious is a necessity, but the kind of religion adopted is a matter of choice. In selecting religion, care should be taken to understand fully the merits of each. The antiquity and popularity of a system, though they show that such a system ought to be examined, are in themselves no arguments in favour of its truth. Truth is beautiful though hated and hooted by the majority of men. The diamond glitters however mean the setting. Like the diamond and the star, truth is beautiful everywhere and always. 2. The choice of religion is limited as to time: "Choose you this day." The present time is God's time and ours: "Now is the acceptable time." We know that; but as for to-morrow, as for the future, we know nothing. II. RELIGION IS PERSONAL. He says, "Choose you." It cannot be done by proxy. Every man must come to God himself. III. RELIGION IS POWERFUL. Religion is life; life is example; and example is almost omnipotent. The smallest pebble cast into the quiet pool causes a series of undulations, and the smallest of these leaves its impression, for millions of ages, on the shore; so does the feeblest soul of man, renewed by grace, make a series of moral impressions on the world—impressions whose record will be legible throughout all eternity. (*Evan Lewis, B.A.*) *On choosing the service of God*:—It is an act of choice, of preference, to which you are called; one of the most familiar, every-day acts of the mind. You are called to change masters; to renounce the world as your portion and to choose God as your portion; to submit to His authority and control, and henceforth live, not to yourself, but to Him who died for you and rose again. And this act of choice or preference is of the nature of a supreme, governing purpose of the mind—such a purpose as gives direction to the current of feeling and desire in the soul. 1. Is it not right that you should choose God as your portion and His service as that which should engage your supreme regards? He is in Himself a being of boundless excellence and glory; your creator, preserver, benefactor, and ruler. 2. The duty in question is enjoined by express command of God. 3. This is a duty which perfectly accords with the nature and destiny of the intelligent, immortal mind with which the Creator has endued you. 4. The choice of God, as the being whom you will serve, is the sum and substance of religion; and you ought all to be religious; friends of God and followers of the Saviour. 5. Every man must choose either God or the world as his portion; and according as he chooses the one or the other, so is his character in the sight of God, and his condition in eternity. 6. There is nothing either within or without you which need prevent your choosing the service of God. He who knows perfectly your frame, your intellectual and moral faculties, and all the circumstances of your condition—He, the God who made and upholds you in being, calls you to enter into His service, to choose Him as your Lord and portion. 7. The service of God is the highest glory of your nature, the most perfect freedom

of rational moral beings; the surest and most abundant source of inward comfort and outward prosperity. It exalts those who are devoted to it to an alliance with the purest and noblest beings in the universe, with prophets and apostles, and glorified spirits in heaven; with ministering angels on high, and with God Himself, the supreme good. It sets the soul upon an endless career of improvement in all that is worthy and good, opens before it bright visions of heavenly glory, secures God's presence and favour for its support and guidance while passing through this world; brings Divine comforts into the bosom in the hour of death, and finally exalts to everlasting rewards in heaven. (*J. Hawes, D.D.*) *Our choice:*—I. Serve the Lord because of HIS GOODNESS. II. Serve the Lord because of HIS WONDROUS MERCY. III. Serve the Lord because of HIS LOVE. Let His love in dying for us cause us to serve the Lord. IV. Serve Him because of HIS PROVIDENCE. V. Serve the Lord also because of HIS SALVATION. (*W. Birch.*) *Serving the Lord:*—I. TRUE RELIGION IS A SERVICE TO THE LORD. How well this was understood under the old dispensation by truly good men! The Lord was set foremost as the aim of all piety, not man. If you are in another's service you do not follow your own wishes, but his; you do not aim to please yourself, but him; your business is to help him and promote his interests. II. THE BEGINNING OF RELIGION IN THE HEART IS WITH THE CHOICE OF THAT SERVICE. Shall Christ have dominion over you or the world? Who has the first right? What says reason? what says conscience? what says the voice of your immortal interests? Thus deliberates the soul in the crises of its history. All persons are to be addressed in this matter as free moral agents. III. TO SOME PERSONS IT SEEMS AN EVIL THING TO CHOOSE THE LORD'S SERVICE. 1. One reason is that which Joshua gives in the lesson: "Ye cannot serve the Lord, for He is a holy God." To choose His service is to renounce sin. This is the secret of many irreligious lives. 2. It seems evil to give up idol-worship. 3. There is a mortification of pride in the choice of God's service which often seems evil. IV. WHETHER IT SEEMS GOOD OR EVIL TO CHOOSE THE LORD'S SERVICE, THERE IS A NECESSITY OF CHOOSING, AND OF CHOOSING NOW. 1. Those Israelites were to weigh the fact that they did that day make some choice. That is the serious dilemma of every awakened soul. You are under the necessity of preferring the service of God or some other. 2. The more important, then, to note that the choice of to-day is likely to be that of to-morrow and all time to come. 3. Last, but not least of all, your choice will have a controlling effect on others. "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." What a lesson to all who are in high places! What an example for men of prominence in every community! What an admonition to every father of a family! How wide-reaching is the influence of such persons over the decision of others! (*W. E. Knox, D.D.*) *The only alternative:*—There are few delusions more fatal, and yet more common, than that of persons labouring to negotiate a treaty betwixt the service of sin and the service of holiness, striving to reconcile the claims of Christianity with the claims of the world. In many cases of every-day life, neutrality is not only lawful, but commendable. But it is far otherwise in matters of religion and in the high interests of immortality. Here no reserve can be admitted—no demur or debate sanctioned—no discreet caution allowed. I. THE TWO SIDES OF THE ALTERNATIVE PROPOSED. 1. The first particularised is the tragical or fatal side. If you choose this day to give yourselves up to the thrall of your turbulent passions, and to become the slaves of all ungodliness, then drown every rising conviction, strangle in the birth all boding apprehensions and all gloomy forecastings of the future. 2. But if you choose an opposite course, if you prefer the service of Jehovah to the service of Satan, the pleasures of holiness to the pleasures of unrighteousness, then stand not for a moment in fatal hesitation, but range yourselves at once under the standard of the Cross and resign yourselves, without reserve and without condition, to the faith and obedience of the gospel, to the love and service of Christ. Let everything bear attestation to the fact that you consider you have a work to execute of great difficulty and of infinite importance, on the issue of which the whole burden of the destinies of endless ages is staked, and therefore you cannot permit your attention to be for a moment diverted away from this one grand and all-absorbing business of your existence, or your faculties to be engrossed by an inferior object. II. THE SPECIAL TIME WHEN THIS OPTION IS TO BE MADE AND THIS DECISION COME TO: "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve." In every relation and condition of human life much depends on the cultivation of favourable junctures and the improvement of propitious moments. The greatest revolutions that have taken place, the most splendid victories that have been won, and the most permanent

conquests that have been achieved, have all depended upon a judicious estimate and critical application of time. If it be true what a writer has observed, "that it is possible to live a thousand years in a quarter of an hour," it holds still truer, that a few minutes lost or improved may decide the complexion of our whole destiny for eternity. Seeing, then, that there is equal hazard and criminality in every moment's delay, in a business so critical and so momentous as the restoration of the soul to God's favour and image, and the insurance of its eternal well-being, we would with all earnestness press it upon you as your first, your predominant, and your ultimate interest, to give yourselves to God now, to give yourselves to God wholly, and to give yourselves to God for ever. (*Joseph Sommerville.*) *God's service as a choice:*—"Choose." God speaks this word to every man amid the thunders of Sinai and the pleadings of Calvary. 1. Christianity is a religion of reason, intelligence, not of authority and force; it appeals to motives; it sets right and wrong, life and death, before every man's mind and calls upon him to choose between them. 2. The choice is voluntary. No deception is used, and no compulsion of any kind. God never coerced a creature's will, and He never will, even to save him! 3. The choice in all cases is a personal one, in view of motives: "Choose you," &c. Each soul will decide his course and destiny, and will be required to give account of himself at the judgment. 4. Every one is at liberty to decline God's service just the same as he is to enter it; but to refuse is to choose. Not to serve Christ is to serve the devil. 5. Hence the entire responsibility of choosing rests on each individual's mind. (*J. M. Sherwood, D.D.*) *Reasons for choosing God's service:*—1. Justice and equity imperiously demand this of us. 2. The claims of gratitude join in enforcing it. 3. The mysteries of redemption. 4. Our best interests are necessarily involved in it. (*The Pulpit.*) *Joshua's permission and determination:*—I. First as to the permission. There is no leave given—and this we wish to be well observed—for the renouncing religion altogether, but only of choosing between the true and the false. Joshua does not say, "Choose whether ye will have the Lord or no God"; but, "Whether ye will have the Lord or the gods of the idolators." But we may not suppose that Joshua here distinguishes atheism from idolatry, as though the people might choose idolatry with a less degree of guiltiness than atheism. He only assumes a broad principle, which the experience of mankind has all along verified, namely, that a nation must have some religion, and that they will worship false gods if they do not worship the true. And then observe, in respect of this permission, that it does not argue indifference on the part of Joshua as to the religion which the people might adopt. He leaves them indeed free to make their election; but still he takes the most effectual mode of recommending truth to their acceptance. His declaration as to the religion which he himself would uphold was the giving all his influence to the side of righteousness; and it were not easy to imagine a more dexterous, and at the same time a more powerful, method of bringing the Israelites to vow allegiance to God than thus leaving them their choice, whilst he gave the weight of his own example to the cause which he desired to support. And yet there is more than this to be advanced with regard to the apparent refusal of Joshua to interfere otherwise than by example with the national religion. It would be easy to misrepresent the permission in question—to construe it into an intimation that in matters of religion rulers should leave a people altogether to themselves; but if you consider the circumstances of the Jewish nation when Joshua delivered the address you will perceive that toleration is the only thing enjoined, and not the non-interference of rulers with religion. The Jews were not without an established religion when Joshua bade them choose between truth and error. Their rulers, acting under the immediate direction of God, had woven a system of worship into all the national institutions, and provided, by every possible means, for the instruction of the people in the fear of the Lord. Rulers cannot interfere with conscience, and having established what they know to be the true religion, and determining to uphold it by their example, toleration, and not persecution, is their business. Therefore "choose you this day whom ye will serve"; decide whether ye will be worshippers of Jehovah or idolators with the Amorites. The intrepid leader of Israel's thousands resolved, even if deserted or opposed by his countrymen, that he would remain staunch in his loyalty to Jehovah. He had satisfied himself as to the nature and demands of true religion; and if none had espoused the same side, his purpose was fixed—to stand alone in the championship of truth. This was sublime, because moral heroism; and Joshua was not a thousandth part as glorious when crossing the Jordan as the captain of the Lord's host, or bidding the sun

stand arrested in the firmament as when, contemplating the possibility of national apostasy, with the image before him of the tribes whom he had led on to victory abandoning the God who had fought all their battles, he uttered the permission and the resolve—"Choose you this day whom ye will serve; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." II. Now, we had intended to speak at length on Joshua's determination, as we have done on his permission; but, in handling the one, we have touched on most of the points suggested by the other. The wisdom, for example, of Joshua's choice is demonstrated by the insufficiency of the reasons which were likely to produce a different choice in the Israelites. Neither the antiquity nor the extent of idolatry could justify its adoption; and if, therefore, the ranks of idolators were swelled by accessions from God's professed people, there would be nothing to warrant a change of purpose in Joshua; and it would still be his wisdom, though it would ask great courage to act on the principle that the Lord alone should be worshipped. Hence the wisdom of the determination requires no proof, whilst its boldness may well put us to the blush, when deterred, as we often are, by a frown or a sneer, from avouching ourselves the resolved servants of God. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *The evil and danger of fickleness in religion*:—I. AN INTIMATION OF THE DANGER THERE IS THAT A GREAT PART OF THE WORLD MAY GROW WEARY OF RELIGION, EVEN WHILST IT IS TAUGHT IN SIMPLICITY AND TRUTH. II. AN ADMONITION THAT SUCH AS ARE DISPOSED TO THROW OFF THE BONDS OF DUTY TO THEIR MAKER WOULD THINK SERIOUSLY WHAT SORT OT CHANGE THEY ARE ABOUT TO VENTURE UPON, AND HOW THEY HOPE TO BE GAINERS BY IT. III. THE RESOLUTION WHICH PRUDENT MEN WILL MAKE, WHATEVER OTHERS DO, TO CONTINUE IN THE PRACTICE OF IT THEMSELVES, AND PRESERVE A CONSCIENTIOUS REGARD TO IT AMONGST ALL THAT ARE PLACED UNDER THEIR INSPECTION. (*Archbp. Secker.*) *National religion*:—1. It is here supposed that a nation must be of some religion or other. Joshua does not put this to their choice, but takes it for granted. 2. That though religion be a matter of choice, yet it is neither a thing indifferent in itself nor to a good governor, what religion his people are of. 3. That true religion may have several prejudices and objections against it: "If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord"; intimating that, upon some accounts, and to some persons, it may appear so. 4. That the true religion hath those real advantages on its side, that it may safely be referred to any considerate man's choice. 5. The example of princes and governors hath a very great influence upon the people in matters of religion. (*Archbp. Tillotson.*) *Choose God now—a sermon to children*:—I. CHOOSE. The melancholy majority of men never did choose their course of life, but have been content to take it from circumstances, from accident, from teachers, from outward influences in which they happened to find themselves. And although they may, step by step, have chosen immediate action for immediate results, what a host of people there are that never set clearly before them the definite aim for which they were living. Choose. Standing as you do at the parting of the ways, get a clear notion of what you are aiming at, and do not let yourselves be moulded by mere accident; do not let yourselves be mere children of impulse; do not owe the shape of your lives to the pressure of circumstances; do not let yourselves be ruled by the moment's inclination; do not be like the weeds in the stream, that move only as it flows. Do not be like the jelly-fishes in the sea, that have no locomotion, or next to none, who are borne along helplessly in the current. "Be a hammer, and not an anvil." Choose! Do not let the world shape you. Exercise your will, your reason, your conscience. Formulate your purposes, say to yourselves what you mean to be and to do; and say it strongly, for this world is no place for weaklings; and wishes and inclinations and good intentions are all very well, but they are not enough. Will and choose, and in the name of God choose the right. II. CHOOSE GOD. I mean choose the God that has come near to you in the Saviour that has loved you and lived for you and died for you; and give your hearts up to Him to be cared for, to be blessed, and your spirits to Him to be cleansed, and to be saved; and then, yielding yourselves to Christ, you will have taken God for your portion. Contrast for one moment the objects that are set before you for your love, trust, and service. And opposite: what a rabble of bestial divinities! Surely there need be no question where a man's heart may fold its wings, like a weary dove, and rest for evermore. For not only is there a contrast between the objects, but there is also a contrast between the results. III. CHOOSE GOD NOW. It can never be too soon to do what is right and noble; it can never be too soon to do what is duty and safety. And let me tell you four reasons why I pray you this. First, the peril of delay. It is not likely that many of you will be laid in your graves before this day next year;

it is certain that some of you will. And because no hand can point to the one that will, let us all listen to the beseeching, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve." Second, because of the rapidly increasing difficulty of making a choice, which is a change. When the clay is on the potter's wheel the lightest touch of the finger can impress it with any form that he desires; when it is taken off and hardened, nothing will change the shape of the vase but smashing it to fragments. Thirdly, because of the loss that you sustain by delay. Why should you be another day without the best blessing that a man can have? Why should you be another day poorer than you need to be? Fourthly, because of the bitter fruits which you are laying up for yourselves by delay, if ever you come to Christ. I would have you "innocent of much transgression." I would have you to "grow up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," that you may never have to look back, in the event of a late return to Him, on a life all given to idols, consumed for self and wasted by sin. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Moral masterhoods:*—I. ALL MEN HAVE SOME MORAL MASTER. The moral monarch of the soul is the object of its supreme regard; the predominant love evermore sways the soul. II. THE MORAL MASTER IS ALWAYS THE OBJECT OF CHOICE. No soul is coerced into the service of any object. III. THE SOONER MEN CHOOSE THEIR MORAL MASTER THE BETTER. 1. Because a wrong moral master will ruin you. 2. Because there is only one right moral Master—the Supreme One. (*Homilist.*) *Religion founded on reason and the right of private judgment:*—I. I observe THAT RELIGION IS A VOLUNTARY THING AND A MATTER OF CHOICE. For mankind are beings endued with reason and liberty, and this alone makes them capable of religion and virtue. Without these powers they would be upon a level with brute creatures, and it is the right or wrong exercise of them that constitutes the moral good or evil of actions. II. We may infer from the text THAT NO MAN CAN BE OBLIGED TO EMBRACE A RELIGION THAT IS EVIL, *i.e.*, contrary to reason and the moral fitness of things; but, on the contrary, is bound to reject it. If any scheme of religion undermines the perfections of God, which the reason of our minds can demonstrate from certain principles, it cannot be true. Again, that scheme of religion must necessarily be false, and ought to be rejected with detestation, which dissolves or weakens the obligations to universal purity, and tends to licentiousness and vice. And though religion must be a voluntary thing and a matter of choice, it is, however, our duty, in order to the making this choice, to be diligent and impartial in our inquiries. For the great Author of our nature hath endued it with such faculties, as are proper to distinguish betwixt truth and error, and appear to have been given us for this very purpose. There is also a fixed and certain standard of truth in the reason of things which, in all cases of importance and necessary influence upon our happiness, is sufficiently clear and explicit to well-disposed minds. And again, though we may with safety reject a religion that is unreasonable, that patronises vice, and is dishonourable to Almighty God, yet it must be allowed that, in order to our being able to judge whether it deserves that character or no, we must carefully and calmly examine it. III. We should learn, from Joshua's example, TO BE FAITHFUL TO THE CAUSE OF GOD AND THE INTEREST OF RELIGION AND VIRTUE EVEN IN TIMES OF MOST GENERAL CORRUPTION AND DEPRAVITY. Singularity in things indifferent may generally perhaps be an argument of weakness and folly, or of unbecoming stiffness and obstinacy; but men have carried the argument much too far when they have paid so great a compliment to custom as to urge it against the practice of virtue itself. For the obligations of virtue are upon no considerations whatsoever to be dispensed with, much less for a piece of foolish fawning complaisance, and a man of reason would never consent to do a thing that was really dishonourable for the sake of avoiding undeserved reproach. Again, to dare to be singularly good is an argument of great resolution and strength of mind, and of a confirmed and established virtue: for such must that virtue be which repels the contagion of ill-examples, and flags not at reproaches and ill-treatment. IV. I shall conclude all with observing that the design of Joshua, TO USE HIS UTMOST CREDIT AND INFLUENCE WITH HIS MORE IMMEDIATE DEPENDENTS FOR THE SUPPORT AND MAINTENANCE OF RELIGION, WAS TRULY NOBLE AND GENEROUS, AND WHAT IT WILL BE HIGHLY FOR THE HONOUR OF EVERY ONE OF US TO IMITATE. (*James Foster.*) *Joshua's proposition and resolution:*—First, Joshua took it for granted that a nation must have a religion of one sort or other. His whole address is built upon this principle; and if there had been a middle way between serving the God of Israel and serving other gods, his discourse would have been inconclusive. Some have pretended that a society of atheists might be tolerably good, and regulated by humane motives, by present rewards and punish-

ments, by shame, disgrace, fear, honour, good-nature, reputation, and self-interest. But this cannot be. Take away religion, and you take away with it the influence of conscience and the strongest motives to social duties. Nothing remains on which mutual reliance can be firmly grounded. All will be done in compliance with external power, and every law will be disregarded, when it may be done with secrecy or impunity and with any present pleasure or profit. Religion, then, is a matter of deliberation and choice. Amidst the diversity of opinions and of worship which divide the world, to walk at hazard in the first path that lies before us, and to which birth and education direct us, and to continue boldly in it without any sort of conviction that it is the right way, this is not the behaviour of a rational agent. God will be loved freely and unconstrainedly, and served by choice and preference. He requires a reasonable service, and man being a rational, a free agent, ought to be able to give some account and some reason for his belief and his actions, and to be afraid to compare truth and falsehood, God and an idol, and to examine which deserves the preference, is doing wrong to God and to His truth. A third remark is upon the time when this is to be done. There is an age of life, and there are occasions, when every one should resolve and make his choice. "Choose you this day," says Joshua. To-day, with every person, is the time when his understanding is mature and opportunities offer. In a Christian nation everything invites us to remember our Creator—the voice of conscience, the example of the wise and good, and the public religion. Here is another thing observable in the text. Joshua supposeth that the Israelites might be weary of serving God, and think His laws to be an unsupportable burden. If it seem evil to you to serve the Lord, how can it seem evil to any rational creature to serve the true and the living Lord? But consult experience and matter of fact, and you will find that men have often been disgusted at truth, and weary of a reasonable service. Thence the inconstancies, rebellions, idolatries, and apostasies of the Jewish nation. True religion hath its difficulties and its dark side, and in some respects may be disagreeable. False religions have in some respects more allurements, are more easy, and more accommodated to indolent inattention, to carnal and corrupted minds. And yet, notwithstanding these advantages of error, no reasonable person can make it a doubt which ought to be preferred. Religion hath its difficulties relating both to faith and to practice, both to the understanding and to the heart. As to faith, it contains things hard to be received by worldly-minded persons. I observed before that false religions may in many respects be more agreeable than the true one to persons of a carnal and sensual temper. Joshua supposed that the religion of the Chaldeans or of the Canaanites might appear such to the people of Israel, when he said to them, "If you will not serve the Lord, choose whether you will serve the gods of your forefathers or the gods of the nations where you now dwell." Here, then, were two false religions to choose out of. Both might please them by their antiquity; and as to that of the inhabitants of Palestine, the Israelites by adopting it might make themselves acceptable to their neighbours. And both these religions, though they might have different objects of worship or different names for their gods, agreed in this, that they taught the worship of many deities and the use of images, and such ceremonies as amused the senses, and required no integrity and purity of heart. If you consider all the more remarkable false religions that have been or are in the world, and all the corrupted systems of true religion, you shall find that they recommend themselves by one or other of these four privileges and characters—either antiquity or extent or ceremonious pomp, or an accommodation to the follies and vices of men. "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." If the doctrines of revealed religion concerning the perfections and the providence of God and the doctrines of revealed religion taught us in the gospel have in them some obscurity and difficulty, it is no more than might justly be expected from the sublime subject. All atheistical and idolatrous systems are, beyond comparison, harder to be admitted by a reasonable man. The moral part of religion is conformable to our nature; and if it be contrary to our depraved inclinations, that is our own fault. Religion hath motives to induce us, examples to direct us, assistances for our infirmities, and helps in time of distress; and if God be a holy and a jealous God, He is also a God of mercy, who forgives and receives the penitent. The boasted advantages and prerogatives of false religions are false and unsound at the bottom. Having considered the wisdom of Joshua's choice, let us consider his person. He was the prince of God's people, and, like Moses, had the authority though not the title of king. Princes and rulers of nations are as much obliged as the meanest of their subjects to serve God. Their example is of

great consequence, and whether they walk in the paths of virtue or of vice they induce others to walk after them. Observe also that the prince of Israel answers for himself and for his family: "I and my house will serve the Lord." He was a wise and a happy man; happy to be so fully assured of the good disposition of his household. (*J. Jortin, D.D.*) *An honourable servitude*:—There are words which will never be popular—as service, servant, master. They carry the idea of humiliation. Every man seeks independence; all aim for position to be at least equal to the highest, the best. Yet service is honourable, if the master is sufficiently honourable. All men are servants of some master. We are all under authority. I. THE SERVICE OF GOD IS THE MOST HONOURABLE IN THE WORLD. II. THE HONOUR IS TO BE SEEN IN THE WORK THE CHRISTIAN IS CALLED UPON TO DO. III. OBSERVE THE TREATMENT RECEIVED BY THOSE WHO SERVE GOD. A servant wishes kind, generous, just treatment. The service of Satan is at first pleasant, then ends in shame and remorse. Where is the liberty of him who serves appetite, passion? Ask Lord Byron. Said he, "I have not had ten happy days." Lord Chesterfield declared, "I have been the whole round of pleasure, and I am disgusted; and for myself, I mean to sleep in my carriage for the rest of my journey." Sinners, you think you are free; loaded with shackles, yet know it not. IV. The time will come when THE FINAL SETTLEMENT WILL BE MADE. (*G. E. Reed.*) *Betweenites*:—I can see where you are, you betweenites. The saints will be ashamed of you, because you did not join with Christ in the day of battle, and the adversary himself will despise you because you shrank away even from him. Be one thing or the other. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *A fatal decision*:—A young soldier from Glasgow was talking to a comrade. In their ears was the muffled sound, the "Dead March in *Saul*," as a comrade was carried to his last resting-place; and this Glasgow soldier, converted up there at Maryhill, was talking to his friend, and pleading with him to come to Christ. The young Highlander there in the funeral march was terribly impressed, and he said, "Jack, I will be a Christian when I leave the service." He had just nine months to put in. He said, "I am determined to be a Christian when I leave the service." Ah! that was his decision. Next week there came orders for the 79th to embark for Egypt. The two friends were in the march across the sands to the Arab encampment of Tel-el-Kebir, marching side by side—the one with the acceptance of salvation in his heart, and the other putting it off till he should leave the service. Softly did they walk across these sands, silently did they steal through the darkness of midnight to the camp of the slumbering Arabs; but the sentinels were on the alert, and they saw a flash of light, and five hundred rifles from the Arab encampment poured their bullets on the advancing Highlanders; and there, dead and cold, was the body of the man who put off the acceptance till he should leave the service. Oh, comrade, what a fatal decision! (*J. Robertson.*) **As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.**—*Joshua's choice*:—I. If we attend to the writings of some, and the manners of more, in the present age, WE SHALL BE LED TO THINK THAT WE ARE NOT TO SERVE EITHER GOD OR MAN; in a word, that we are born free and independent. Why, we should not live six hours after our birth in such a state. From the first moment in which we see light, we depend, for preservation and support on the good offices of those around us; they depend on others, and all on God. Man being thus dependent, it is but reasonable that he should acknowledge such dependence, and that he should serve. II. WHOM he should serve. For, as the apostle has remarked, "there are gods many and lords many," who, in different ages, have obtained the homage of mankind. The oldest and first idolators worshipped the powers of nature instead of the God of nature. The world, with its fashions and its follies, its principles and its practices, has been proposed in form to Englishmen as the proper object of their attention and devotion. A late celebrated nobleman has avowed as much with respect to himself, and by his writings said in effect to it, "Save me, for thou art my god!" At the close of life, however, his god, he found, was about to forsake him, and therefore was forsaken by him. "I have run," says this man of the world, "the silly rounds of business and pleasure, and have done with them all. I have enjoyed all the pleasures of the world, and, consequently, know their futility, and do not regret their loss. I think of nothing but killing time the best I can now he has become mine enemy. It is my resolution to sleep in the carriage during the remainder of the journey." When a Christian priest speaks slightingly of the world he is supposed to do it in the way of his profession, and to decry, through envy, the pleasures he is forbidden to taste. But here, I think, you have the testimony of a witness every way competent. III. HOW WE ARE TO SERVE GOD. A concise way of coming

at this will be, to reflect upon the qualifications you require in a good servant, and to see that they be found in yourselves, considered as the servants of God. These qualifications may all be reduced to two—that he be careful to know the will of his master and diligent to do it. In our inquiries after the will of God we are often apt to be partial. We inquire after only such parts of it as may happen to coincide with our circumstances, our situation, our tempers, our constitutions, our interests. But there are no reserves in St. Paul's question: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Whatever it may be, whatever the difficulties, whatever the consequences, I am ready. There is yet a different error in the conduct of men. It is when they employ themselves to discover the obligations and the failings of others, entirely forgetful of their own. The last mistake that shall be mentioned, relative to our inquiries after the will of God, is, when we make those inquiries as matter of speculation only, as an amusement of the mind. (*Bp. Horne.*) *Decision for the Lord*:—I. First, let me DESCRIBE IT. It means many things, all of which must be wrought in us by Divine grace, or we shall never possess them, though we may have their counterfeits. 1. Decision implies, first, that all hesitation is gone. You will make no journey, O traveller, if, now that the sun is in its zenith, you do not decide which way to walk! Mariner, your voyages will be scant if you much longer lie at anchor! The season of favourable winds is passing away, and yet your sail remains unfilled; will you never have solved the problem, "To what port shall I steer? With what cargo shall I load my ship?" Is our life to end in a constant repetition of the question, "What shall I be?" 2. This state of heart indicates superiority to the evil influence of others. Our own understandings should now be exercised, or else why are they given to us? God waits to guide us, but He would have us cry to Him, and not follow the trail of our fellows. 3. Right decision for God is deep, calm, clear, fixed, well grounded, and solemnly made. Joshua does not speak his determination lightly. He speaks with immovable resolve: his soul is anchored and defies all storms—"As for me and my house we will, despite crowds and customs, we will, despite temptations and trials, we will, despite idols or devils, to the end of the chapter serve Jehovah." 4. That resolve on the part of Joshua was openly avowed. That is sorry courage which skulks behind the bushes: that is poor loyalty which never utters the king's name; that is questionable decision which dares not own itself to be on the Lord's side. Are you not ashamed of being ashamed, and afraid to be any longer afraid? 5. In Joshua's case his resolve was not only openly avowed, but earnestly carried out. He was a soldier, and if any one had asked him, "Whose soldier are you, Joshua?" he would have answered, "I am God's soldier." "Whose battles do you fight?" "I fight the battles of Jehovah." "And what is your object in fighting?" "To glorify Jehovah." 6. Joshua's decision was adhered to throughout the whole of his life. He had begun early in the service of God, and he never repented of it. Blessed are they who have this abiding thoroughness in the cause of the Lord their God. II. Let me now PRAISE DECISION. In religion nothing is more desirable than to be out-and-out in it. 1. To enjoy religion you must plunge into it. To wade into it up to the ankles may make you shiver with anxieties, doubts, and questionings, till you resemble a trembling boy unwillingly entering a bath on a cold morning; but to plunge into its depths is to secure a glow of holy joy. The central position in religion is the sweetest. The nearer to God the sweeter the joy. 2. Decision for God enables a man to direct his way. David prayed, "Lead me in a plain path because of mine enemies," and the man who has made up his mind by Divine grace that he will serve the Lord has that prayer fulfilled. 3. This saves many men from temptation. As a giant walks along unconscious of the cobwebs across his path, so does a thoroughly consecrated man break through a thousand temptations, which indeed to him are no longer temptations at all. 4. Thorough-going men wield a mighty influence. Joshua was able to speak for his house as well as for himself. Many fathers cannot speak for themselves, and therefore you may guess the reason why they cannot speak for their families. III. I close by DEMANDING THIS DECISION FOR CHRIST which I have described and praised. Decision is required because the Lord deserves to have it. He who made us ought not to be served hesitatingly; He who gave His Son to die for us ought not to be trifled with. By the splendour of Deity, and the glory of the Cross, I claim your whole hearts for my Lord. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Joshua's resolution to serve the Lord*:—I. THE OCCASION OF THESE WORDS. II. WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THE RESOLUTION? 1. A solemn and exclusive worship of God from the heart. 2. In all the actions of our life to have respect to the will of God, to seek to please Him, to seek to glorify Him. 3. There are three

ingredients in the service of God that may be considered as giving vitality to it. (1) The first is sincerity. The servant of God makes an entire surrender of himself to the service of God, and keeps back nothing from Him. (2) Next, this obedience must be minute—His service must be universally adhered to. There is a harmony and consistency between all the parts of real practical religion, so that they cannot be separated one from another, and if we separate them we deceive ourselves and lose sight of God. (3) Another ingredient in the service of God, if it be true and genuine, is that, like the principle from which it proceeds, it is permanent and abiding. III. SOME OF THE REASONS WHY WE SHOULD CLOSE WITH THE RESOLUTION OF JOSHUA. 1. It is our duty to serve the Lord from the relation in which we stand to Him and the unspeakable benefits we derive from His goodness. 2. The grand distinction of man above the other creatures consists in such a constitution of our nature as appears to have no other end or object but that of qualifying us for the end of worshipping God. 3. Consider, next, the great rewards which hereafter necessarily accompany the service of God. 4. Recollect, again, the impossibility of neutrality and the danger of delay. 5. Recollect, in a very short time, if you are not employed in the service of God, you will have no portion, no employment beneficial or dignified or delightful to all eternity. (*R. Hall, M.A.*)

Concerning resolution and steadfastness in religion:—I. OF THE BRAVE RESOLUTION OF A GOOD MAN, THAT IF THERE WERE OCCASION, AND THINGS WERE BROUGHT TO THAT EXTREMITY, HE WOULD STAND ALONE IN THE PROFESSION AND PRACTICE OF GOD'S TRUE RELIGION. 1. The matter of this resolution. Joshua here resolves that, if need were, he would stand alone in the profession and practice of the true religion. And this is not a mere supposition of an impossible case, which can never happen; for it may, and hath really and in fact happened in several ages and places of the world. 2. The due limits and bounds of this peremptory resolution. In all matters of faith and practice which are plain and evident, either from natural reason or from Divine revelation, this resolution seems to be very reasonable; but in things doubtful, a modest man—and every man hath reason to be so—would be very apt to be staggered by the judgment of a very wise man; and much more of many such, and especially by the unanimous judgment of the generality of men, the general voice and opinion of mankind being next to the voice of God Himself. II. TO VINDICATE THE REASONABLENESS OF THIS RESOLUTION FROM THE OBJECTIONS TO WHICH THIS SINGULAR AND PEREMPTORY KIND OF RESOLUTION MAY SEEM LIABLE. 1. It may very speciously be said that this does not seem modest for a man to set up his own private judgment against the general suffrage and vote. And it is very true that about things indifferent a man should not be stiff and singular, and in things doubtful and obscure a man should not be over-confident of his own judgment; but in things that are plain, either from Scripture or reason, it is neither immodesty nor a culpable singularity for a man to stand alone in defence of the truth, because in such a case a man does not oppose his own single and private judgment to the judgment of many, but the common reason of mankind and the judgment of God plainly declared in His Word. 2. It is pretended that it is more prudent for private persons to err with the Church than to be so pertinacious in their own opinions. To which I answer, that it may indeed be pardonable in some cases to be led into mistake by the authority of those to whose judgment and instruction we ought to pay a great deference and submission, provided always it be in things which are not plain and necessary; but surely it can never be prudent to err with any number, how great soever, in matters of religion which are of moment, merely for numbers' sake; but to comply with the known errors and corruptions of any Church whatsoever is certainly damnable. 3. It is pretended yet further, that men shall sooner be excused in following the Church than any particular man or sect. To this I answer, that it is very true, if the matter be doubtful, and especially if the probabilities be equal, or near equal, on both sides; but if the error be gross and palpable, it will be no excuse to have followed any number of men, or any Church whatsoever. 4. It is objected, that as, on the one hand, there may be danger of error in following blindly the belief of the Church, so, on the other hand, there is as great a danger of schism in forsaking the communion of the Church, upon pretence of errors and corruptions. Very true; but where great errors and corruptions are not only pretended, but are real and evident, and where our compliance with those errors and corruptions is made a necessary condition of our communion with that Church, in that case the guilt of schism, how great a crime soever it be, doth not fall upon those who forsake the communion of that Church, but upon those who drive them out of it by the sinful conditions which they impose

upon them. (*Abp. Tillotson.*) *Concerning family religion*:—I. I SHALL SHOW WHEREIN THE PRACTICE OF THIS DUTY DOTH CONSIST. The principal parts of it are these following:—1. Setting up the constant worship of God in our families. 2. Instructing those committed to our charge in the fundamental principles and in the careful practice of the necessary duties of religion. 3. I add further, as a considerable part of the duty of parents and masters of families, if they be desirous to have their children and servants religious in good earnest, that they do not only allow time and opportunity, but that they do also earnestly charge them to retire every day, but more especially on the Lord's day, to pray to God for the forgiveness of their sins, and for His mercy and blessings upon them, and likewise to praise Him for all His favours conferred upon them from day to day. 4. One of the most effectual ways to make those who are under our authority good is to be good ourselves, and by our good example to show them the way to be so. Without this our best instructions will signify but very little, and the main efficacy of them will be lost. II. OUR OBLIGATION TO IT. 1. In point of duty. All authority over others is a talent entrusted with us by God for the benefit and good of others, and for which we are accountable, if we do not improve it and make use of it to that end. 2. We are hereto likewise obliged in point of interest; because it is really for our advantage that those that belong to us should serve and fear God, religion being the surest foundation of the duties of all relations and the best security for the true performance of them. Would we have dutiful and obedient children, diligent and faithful servants? Nothing will so effectually oblige them to be so as the fear of God and the principles of religion firmly settled in them. III. THE CAUSES OF THE SO COMMON AND SHAMEFUL NEGLECT OF THIS DUTY, TO THE EXCEEDING GREAT DECAY OF PIETY AMONG US. 1. This may in good part be ascribed to our civil confusions and distractions. 2. This great neglect and decay of religious order in families is chiefly owing to our dissensions and differences in religion, upon occasion whereof many, under the pretence of conscience, have broke loose into a boundless liberty. IV. THE VERY MISCHIEVOUS AND FATAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE NEGLECT OF THIS DUTY. 1. To the public. Families are the first seminaries of religion, and if care be not there taken to prepare persons, especially in their tender years, for public teaching and instruction, it is like to have but very little effect. 2. To ourselves. We can have no manner of security of the duty and fidelity of those of our family to us if they have no sense of religion, no fear of God before their eyes. If children were carefully educated, and families regularly and religiously ordered, what a happy and delightful place, what a paradise, would this world be in comparison of what now it is? (*Ibid.*) *Joshua's resolution*:—I. TRUE RELIGION CONSISTS IN THE SERVICE OF GOD. II. THEY WHO TRULY SERVE GOD MAKE HIS SERVICE A MATTER OF CHOICE. III. IF THE SERVICE OF GOD IS THE OBJECT OF OUR CHOICE, IT IS OUR DUTY TO ENGAGE OURSELVES TO IT BY OPEN PROFESSION AND SOLEMN COVENANT. IV. IF WE HAVE DEVOTED OURSELVES TO THE SERVICE OF GOD IT IS OUR DUTY TO USE EVERY MEANS TO ENGAGE OTHERS IN IT. (*Essex Congregational Remembrancer.*) *Historical and family religion*:—The valedictory charge of Joshua clearly shows that the Jewish religion was built upon a definite historical experience; was founded on the rocks of impregnable fact. Never in the whole course of their history had the Israelites found God unfaithful to His promises or forgetful of His threatenings; and as God had been from the beginning, so (said Joshua) will He continue to the end. What God has been He will ever be, what He has done He ever will do—therefore "choose ye," said Joshua, "this day whom you will serve." If history proves that the Lord Jehovah is God, then follow Him and faithfully obey His voice. This, then, is what we mean by an historical religion. An historical religion is an appeal to the witness of the past as a groundwork and reason for present allegiance to God. And as the Jewish religion was an historical religion, so also is the Christian religion. The Christian religion is not a doctrine of ideas, an untested philosophical theory: it is founded on the life of an historical Person, for Christ is no less historic than Divine. And as Jewish leaders and prophets appealed to the witness of history, so likewise have Christian guides and teachers, from the earliest times, made history a principal reason for faith. All true religion, however, and most notably the religion of the Bible, is much more than an historic faith. Its foundations lie deep and strong in history; but its superstructure is continuously and essentially practical. Historic religion, like historic knowledge, is useless unless it serves as the guide and inspiration of daily conduct. The use of history chiefly consists in its application of the experiences of the past to the circumstances and resolutions of the present. It was this use to

which Joshua applied the striking historical survey of his great valedictory charge. Upon the ground of their historical experiences he based his fervid appeal to the Jewish people to make choice of Jehovah as their national Deity, and to remain consistently faithful in their allegiance to Him. Whatever became of the national religion, his own family religion at least should be settled and unwavering in its loyalty to Jehovah. Family religion is the best beginning for all religious life. The Church in the house is the best temple for the education of righteousness and true holiness. As the sun is the centre of the earth's light and heat, so from the family radiates throughout the world the heat and light of religion. When families are religious, nations are religious; when families are religious, individuals also are religious. Even the very structure of the Bible seems to lend authority to the conviction of the primary importance of family religion. The three great divisions of the Old Testament—the law, the prophets, the psalms or hagiographa—broadly represent the three great spheres in which religion ought to work. The book of the law, the foundation of all revelation, was written during the patriarchal period. It describes the origin, the management, the sacred functions, of the family. In the New Testament, also, great stress is laid upon family religion. As nature makes families into little kingdoms, so Christianity makes families into little Churches. It was in the devotion of family life that Jesus nursed His faculty for worship and His character for holiness. It is impossible to conceive any institution hedged round with more firm and higher walls than the institution of the family. The New Testament regards the family as a Divine institution, and its relationships as sacred, heavenly, relationships. It cannot but be that an institution with an origin and sanctions so Divine, should be intended to work out great blessings for humanity. And all experience proves that family love and family religion are more fruitful of happiness and holiness than any other single source; and that family discords and family irreligion are the cause of endless miseries and countless iniquities. (*Canon Diggle.*) *The cluster of grapes; or, family prayer*:—Man, we all know, is not made to live alone. None of us could do so, even if we wished it. As no man can come into the world without a father or mother to bring him into it—as no child, when it has received the gift of life, could keep that gift for much more than a single round of the clock without some one to tend and feed it—in like manner, after we are grown up, and have gained strength to stand alone, we still need the help of our brethren in a thousand ways. Every worthy and reasonable and honourable work which man is permitted to perform can only be performed by him so far as he lives in union and communion with his brethren. Thus too is it with the highest and most precious of all the gifts which God has bestowed on mankind, the religion of Christ. This also is a gift which cannot be received alone, which cannot be enjoyed alone, which cannot be turned to any use alone. In giving it to man God did not give it to him as standing alone, but as living in communion with his brethren. He purposes that in spiritual things, as well as in temporal things, we should help and feed each other, that we should nourish each other with the bread of life, as well as with the bread that perishes. You remember our Lord's beautiful parable in which He compares Himself to the vine and His disciples to the branches. All the members of the same family, all the members of the same parish, should draw their spiritual life from the heavenly Vine, not singly, but together, joining heart and soul in the exercises and offices of devotion, and keeping in mind that it is when two or three are gathered together that our Lord has promised to be in the midst of them. "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." This should be the plain, the avowed, the steadfast resolution of every one who bears rule in a house, of every master of a household, of every father, of every mother of a family. When God ordains that every one should be the master or the mistress of a household, He likewise ordains that they should take care of those who are under their authority, and should look upon them as committed to their special charge. In like manner when He is pleased to grant any one the blessing of being a father or a mother He links this blessing with the duty of taking care of the children, of bringing them up, of providing for them. We shall have to give account, not only for our own souls, but also, more or less, for the souls of those whom God has committed to our charge. Let this then be your watchword, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." It is not enough for you to say, "As for me, I will serve the Lord." A grape never stands alone: it is always part of a cluster. In truth no one can feel any hearty desire to serve the Lord himself, without being at the same time anxious that others also, that his friends and neighbours, above all, that the members of his own household, should bear their part in this

godly service. And one of the ways in which it behoves you to provide that your house shall serve the Lord is by setting up His worship in your house, by taking care that you and your whole house join day by day in serving Him with prayer and thanksgiving and praise. Most important, too, is it that every family should be perpetually reminded that, as a family, it is a Christian family—that the Church is not God's only house in the parish, but that every house in the parish ought to be a house of God. We have been led by our Lord's parable to liken a Christian family and a Christian congregation to a cluster of grapes. Such are they, if they hang from the true Vine, if the life which springs from the true Vine be ever flowing into them through prayer—through prayer offered up in brotherly communion one beside the other. And what can give a more beautiful image of the love, the neighbourly kindness, the peace, which ought to prevail in a brotherhood of Christians, than a cluster of grapes? None of them seems to have any desire of thrusting itself forward before the others, or of pushing them into the background, or of showing itself off at their cost. On the contrary each seems contented to stand just peeping out of its cell, half hidden by its neighbours, retiring behind them, and almost, as it were, in honour preferring them. Such are the grapes of the true Vine. Such are the families in the living Church of Christ. They hang from Him. Their love flows into them from Him; and therefore they love each other. (*J. C. Hare, M.A.*) *The Christian household* :—The household is not an accident of nature, but an ordinance of God. The household is a representation, on a small scale as regards numbers, but not as regards the interests concerned, of the great family in heaven and earth. The father of a household stands most immediately in God's place. Of all the influences which can be brought to bear on man, paternal influence may be made the strongest and most salutary, and whether so made or not is ever of immense weight one way or the other. For remember that paternal influence is not that which the father strives to exert merely, but that which in matter of fact he does exert. None so keen to see into a man's religion as his own household. He may deceive others without, he may deceive himself, he can hardly long succeed in deceiving them. But if, on the other hand, his religion is really a thing in his heart; if he moves about day by day as seeing One invisible; if the love of Christ is really warming the springs of his inner life, then, however inadequately this is shown in matter or in manner, it will be sure to be known and thoroughly appreciated by those who are ever living their lives around him. But in treating of a household ruled in the fear of God another most important influence comes to be considered—one which, without holding so paramount a place as the first, yet ever lies closer to the hearts of children, and is more wound about all their schemes and plans. From the very necessities of life the father is kept ordinarily at a distance from his family during a great portion of his time. He is that one of the household who goes forth into the external world and savours of it; and thus not only in continuity, but in character also, his influence is in some measure broken; lying at some little distance, not employed on the thoughts and schemes of his children till they have acquired some degree of consistency; not called in to mould and cherish their first openings of intention and desire. This necessary deficiency is, however, amply and most graciously supplied by the mother of a household. She is ever the ministering angel to her children; with the same hand guiding their infant steps, and smoothing the fevered pillow of after-life; with the same voice teaching them their infant prayers, and with quiet and loving admonition tempering the waywardness of the rising spirits of youth. And thus while she shares in many of the feelings of reverence and affection due to the father, she yet has a narrower circle of her own. To her is committed by God the training and forming of each individual character among her children; in her bosom will take root those finer fibres of personal feeling from which, after all, our strongest emotions are fed. Oh that every Christian mother were living and moving in her household in the full consciousness of this power and this responsibility! Much might be said on a mother's share in the after-training of her children, even when other help is requisite and necessary; but it is only one very short and simple thing which need be said on their earliest training—it is a matter to which a mother alone is competent, a sacred duty which she can never neglect, and ought never to delegate. (*Dean Alford.*) *The charities of the Christian household* :—I wish now to speak of the good works of the Christian household, its religious standing and progress within, and its beneficent employments without, for the good of man and the glory of God. Now we must lay the foundation of all such external duties in the religion of the household. Let the well-spring of the religion of the family be in

the closet and by the bedside of the father and mother. And not only this, but let the children, let the servants see that it is so, and learn to take not precept only, but pattern from them. And if the foundation be thus laid, let us go on to inquire what, and how raised, must be the building. First of all, it must be real, consistent with itself; raised for a dwelling, and not for a show. In a man's own religion reality is the first and most constant requisite; but where influence is to be exerted over others it is even doubly necessary. Hearts are not won by words, nor will knees ever so often bended prompt one syllable of prayer. And here is often a fault in Christian heads of families. Their own religion is real—felt in their hearts, and shown in their lives. But their way of putting it forth is unreal. They are perhaps the bondsmen of a rigid system, or they fall into the opposite extreme, and leave that on which they themselves feel so deeply to take its chance among those whom God has given them to train for Him. In the one case, that of rigid adherence to system, the force of their own example is marred, the attraction of their own faith and love disturbed; in the other they are bearing indeed good seed, but sow it not, letting human nature, which ever wants help from above and from around, get its good as it best may. How often do we see heads of families, whom we know to be earnest and genuine Christian men and women, yet attempting to guide their households by the merest and emptiest commonplaces, which never had, and never can have, life or power in them. Oh that we knew and remembered this—that nought unreal will ever stand God's test of time and trial. You may teach the child his theological lesson ever so well; he may be apt to distinguish, apt to retain, ready to profess; yet meantime, if you have not preoccupied it, the heart, which really guides the life, will have been learning from things themselves another and a surer lesson, and you will find, when the voyage of life begins, that voyage which you had expected would be so straight and so sure, that another hand than yours is on the helm. In promoting family religion let parents study the hearts of their children. Let them see what those cords really are which, according as they are drawn one way or the other, turn the course of life itself. Let them remember what it was in their own case which really influenced them for good, and reflect that their children are like themselves. Win the heart, and the victory is yours. Lose that, and you have lost all. Before I pass to the outward acts and fruits of family religion let me exemplify these remarks in two departments of the inner life of the household: in their use of the Bible and in family prayer. The Bibles of a household, if they could testify, would be no bad witnesses respecting its religion. And I fear their testimony would be often of a sad and a startling kind. The Bible in the chamber, how often is it taken down for genuine use? The contents of that Bible, how much is known of them? I do not believe there ever was an age when the Bible has been so much printed and so little read as in our own. And this is the book which is to be a light to our feet and a lamp to our paths. And therefore one of the very first cares in a Christian and Protestant household ought to be that the Bible may be known by all its members: known, I mean, by familiarity with its contents, and a habit of thinking and speaking intelligently on them, and a habit also—for this should never be forgotten—of their devotional use. It is plain that this subject might be pursued much further, but we must drop it now, to mention another nearly connected with it—I mean that of family prayer. Family prayer is an absolute necessity of the Christian household. It is indeed an affecting and solemn sight; and it might be a vast opportunity for good. Here is a priest of whose power we can never speak too highly, a teacher standing in the place of God Himself. But what are, for the most part, his ministrations—what his instructions? To judge from the books which have been printed for use at such times, for the most part, I fear, formal, disconnected, lifeless; or if earnest and fervent, then passing perhaps into another fault equally fatal to usefulness—lengthy and tedious. The effect of this must be mischievous. You cannot expect children, you cannot expect servants, to love and consult and study a work which you have accustomed them to loathe and to be weary over. Nor, to recur back to the other fault again, can you expect them really to feel wants which have been so long lifelessly and formally expressed; uttered perhaps in words far above their comprehension, and in a strain to which their simple minds never attained. Of all united acts of the family this one should most bear the impress of life and reality. Read no more than the ear, no more than the mind can retain—and that little with earnestness and solemnity. If explanation is given let it be short and to the point—neither dilating nor diluting. And with regard to prayer, the rule should be of the same kind. The simpler the better. And I may also say, without fear of

being misunderstood, the shorter the better. But from these counsels respecting the inner life of the family we must pass now to its outward fruits of its religion. And here at once let me say that such fruits ought always to be found. There never ought to be such a thing as a hidden family religion in any sense, and least of all in the sense of being without visible and sensible fruit for good. And in family charity, as in all other family duties, the spring must ever be found in the heads of the household. Let them be known by their children and dependents to be engaged in works of charity and mercy. And in their places and proportions let each, even the humblest member, be encouraged, as soon as self-control and responsibility begin, to bear a part in such works. And I cannot impress it too strongly on young persons that this duty is binding on them from the moment that they can call money or time their own. Whatever is allowed you by your parents for ordinary purposes, all of it belongs to God, and you are but His steward. On the beneficence due from every Christian household to the poor and needy around it I will not at present enlarge; it is a wide subject, and comes before us in the course of our teaching in various ways. I will only say no household can escape its claims or venture, from any excuse, to set them aside. But I would especially now speak of that other department of a Christian family's benevolence which should be spent in their work as disciples of Him who commanded us to enlighten all nations with the word of His truth. Every Christian is described in Scripture as holding forth the word of truth, shining as a light in the world. Every Christian is a missionary, and ought to be employed in the work of one—either in personal labour and influence, or by contribution to institutions established for the purpose. And as a family duty this possesses peculiar interest. In Christ are all families of the earth blessed. (*Ibid.*)

The mutual duties of the family:—From the tone of these words we see that they are not the voice of one man only. There is about them a concerted determination, they bear evidence of deliberation having been had, and a combined resolution come to. There is something even of triumphant union about them, something of a challenge to Israel to look and see whether they of whom they are said did not fulfil them by serving the Lord. Every member of a household, whether among children or domestics, has a place assigned by God and a solemn account to render to Him. I will touch on this portion of our subject—the duties of the members of a household, and their reflection on those who are set at the head of it. If I were to ask what is the first duty of a child to a parent the answer would be one and uniform. All would say, obedience. Yet is this quite understood? At all events, is it generally acted on? What I understand by obedience being the first duty of young persons to their parents is this—that, irrespective of all concurrence of their own individual approval with what is ordered, there is a sacredness about a parent's word, because it is so, which ensures prompt and ready compliance. I would say, then, to my young friends, guard carefully and with all diligence this your chief jewel and treasure—constant and scrupulous obedience. It is the bloom of your whole character. Nothing becomes you so well—nothing contains so great promise for your future days. It is a link which, between a loving and wise parent and a Christian child, is never dissolved; and I know of no sight so pleasing as to see men and women, moving in life and filling important posts which God has assigned them, and yet with reverence and affection retaining the pious habits of childhood and youth—observing the wishes and ruling themselves by the guidance of an aged parent. I am sure I need not remind ourselves who are parents how very solemn is the position of one who is thus to be obeyed—how necessary the wisdom which is from above to guide us in guiding them. I need not say how much love, how much consistency, how much temper is required to lead up and train this sacred principle of obedience, so that it be not relaxed on the one hand nor overstrained on the other. Before I pass on to the other great division of the members of a family, let me say a word to young persons as to the direct subject of the resolution in our text—the service of the Lord. You will some day know and feel, on looking back over these first years of life, that it is the memory of the service of God which constitutes the real charm of your recollections of home. And if it is but fitting to say something of those others who dwell under the roof of a household to minister to their wants, I would say to the servants in our households, Your gracious Father in heaven has called you out of your own country and from your own father's house, and He has caused you to be adopted into other families, of a rank and situation in life different from your own. If you are His servants your position is one full of interest, and full of honour. He has put you

in reach of many blessings, both temporal and spiritual, to which others of your family have not access. And more especially is this so if your lot is cast in a household where God is feared and served. But as the servant's life is one of much and undoubted privilege for good, so is it one of enormous temptation to evil. There is no class of persons in our days the contemplation of whom more fills the Christian mind with sadness, or suggests more forcibly the frightful account which the votaries of fashion and pleasure will one day have to give. How many souls have the ungodly heads of a household helped to ruin, or been the means of ruining altogether? God sent to them, to be kept and influenced for Him, dependents whose souls were as valuable as their own; whose account before Him will be as solemn, their condemnation or justification as final, as theirs. They came to them from the Sunday school and the village pastor's instructions; they came with the Bible which was to be the guide of their lives, with the prayer which had been the practice of their childhood, with the resolution which the last communion prompted and the mother's parting words urged forward. Where are those Bibles now? What is become of that daily prayer? Where, but under your roof, and with your sanction, was that resolution laughed to scorn? Who made it impossible for them to keep up those monthly communions? If you have in your family and before your dependents denied Christ, He also will deny you. And let servants themselves remember that no circumstances can excuse them in unfaithfulness to Him whom they have once learned to know and to serve; that on themselves the ultimate burden must rest, and the final condemnation come, if they allow themselves to be laughed or tempted out of Christian habits of life. I would willingly think, too, that I am speaking to some of this class whose lot God has mercifully cast in families such as that in our text, where their souls are cared for, and their moral and spiritual welfare attended to. Then I say to you, Blessed indeed is your lot, and great in proportion will be your accountableness. (*Ibid.*) *Hindrances to home religion*:—I. The want of a vivid sense of God, as personal and present. II. The loose manner in which the present home life is conducted. III. The diminished regard for the Sabbath. IV. The overlaying of the Bible and the family altar by the newspapers, and especially the Sunday papers. V. The dispersion of families among Churches having different views of Divine things. VI. The division of families on the line of Christian discipleship. VII. The lack in some homes of an expressive and impressive piety in such as do profess to be believers, such as will quietly control and at last convert the household. (*J. L. Withrow, D.D.*) *We should think about the religious welfare of others*:—A poor woman came into a village one dark night and asked her way to the house of a friend. It was three miles off yet, and the road was strange to her, and it was so dark. "If you make haste," some one said to her, "you will overtake the doctor. He has just gone down the road to go to the same place, and he carries a lantern." This was glad news to the timid woman, and off she started looking eagerly ahead in the hope of catching some glimmer of the lantern's light, but never a flash of it could she see. At length, after a weary trudge, she reached the house of her friend, and there she found the doctor newly arrived. "Oh, sir!" she said, "I have had such a weary run after you. They told me you had a lantern, but I saw nothing of its light." "Very true," said the doctor, showing a dark lantern fastened to his belt; "I had a lantern, but I did not think of drawing the slide so as to let the light shine, for I know the road very well myself." Now there are people in the world very like this doctor. They know the right way themselves, and don't trouble about others who may not know it. Make it very clear to others that you not only know the right road yourself, but that you have also a heart to think of them and influence them for good. (*W. Francis.*) *Decision for God*:—"I was the guest of Colonel ——, a leading man in his county, Master of the Hounds for two counties, keeping the hounds at a cost of $20,000 a year. He was a man of passionate character, and, when excited, very profane. He attended the meetings every evening. But he complained that he had a headache the next morning. One morning at breakfast he said, 'I don't think I shall go to the meetings any longer. My head aches with the bad air, and then I do not think you are quite fair. You make everybody out as no better than heathen. That may be true of the common people; but you will drive all the gentry away.' I said, 'Colonel, I am your guest, and I did not introduce this subject. But let me ask you, Are you a Christian?' 'What do you mean? I support a Church and two or three ministers.' I said, 'Unless you will take a stand as a Christian as plainly as you do as Master of the Hounds, I do not think you have any claim to be called a

Christian.' To my surprise, he was in church that night, with his wife, who was a Christian. I preached on the Pharisee and the Publican. At the close I said, 'If there is any man or woman who is ready, with the publican, to say, "God be merciful to me a sinner," I invite him to rise.' To my surprise, up rose the Colonel, and folded his arms, and his wife by his side. I thought, 'Will it do to call the Colonel up here and ask him to go on his knees?' I did so. The Colonel moved right forward with his wife. And the next that came was the Irish servant, and he kneeled down by his master. Next morning, as I opened the Bible for prayers, the Colonel rose and said, 'Before the Doctor reads, I want to say that last night I went forward and took God as my Saviour. I ask you, my friends, to pray for me.' This in the presence of all the servants." (*Dr. Pentecost.*) *Who will volunteer?*—One night, in the army on the banks of the Potomac, the colonel came for volunteers to cross over the river in flat boats. "Who'll volunteer? I want so many men." "I'll go!" "I'll go!" Their decision made up the number; the colonel's heart was rejoiced. They went, and returned with 150 or 200 contrabands and other trophies of war. That was the result of decision. They took their lives in their hands and went on reckless of consequences. In order to spiritual success we need decision. How long would it take the Lord Jesus to do His part if you make the decision? There are a hundred strings whereby you are holding on to the interests of the world. You cut a string here and a knot there, but there are more left than you have cut off; come right to the central point where they all come to a focus, then you can cut them all at once. The work is all in a nutshell. Some are converted by piecemeal. The better way is to take it in a lump. How long does it take to give away a house and land? Only while you sign your name, that is all. When we go forth, a troop of decided souls, we can take the world for Christ. Take Christ fully, completely, that will give us inward power.

Vers. 19–28. **Ye cannot serve the Lord: for He is an holy God.**—*The covenant renewed:*—I. THE DIFFICULTY OF SERVING GOD. "Ye cannot serve the Lord." It was a staggering admonition. It embodied what theologians have called the doctrine of "moral inability." The seat of the disorder is in the will. There is the conflict. Till that is established in the choice of holiness it will still be true, as in the case before us, that one can not serve God. "Ye cannot" should still read for many, loath to abandon practices and ideas and hopes which He condemns, "Ye will not." II. THE CONSCIOUS ABILITY TO SERVE GOD. With much vehemence the people asserted that they would, and therefore could, be true to their promise. They realised that no more was demanded of them than was within the range of their powers to do. Their tribute to the righteousness of their Maker is the universal testimony as well. From the shrine of the most besotted savage to the latest Christian altar we see the multiplying tokens that each and all might have heeded and wrought that full measure of righteousness which their God prescribed. Everywhere, on all the recognised possibilities of a human soul, is plainly imprinted, and none can honestly exclaim against it, "This is your reasonable service." III. THE SOLEMN PROMISE TO SERVE GOD. The transfer of estates, the giving in marriage, the parting with a child—these chief acts of our lives are trivial and ordinary compared with that in which a heart yields itself for ever unto Him who has sought it from its first conscious moment. It is serious business we transact with Him. He hears, too, each voice among the myriads as though it were the only one, and receives each uplifted spirit as though no other had come. IV. THE ABIDING WITNESSES OF THE PLEDGE TO SERVE GOD. As our memorials and statues are eloquent of former scenes and persons, to those who will pause a little to listen, so this column in the spot of sanctuary told to children's children that their fathers were given here and for ever to the Lord. Every individual, too, that stood near any who there uttered his "credo" had stamped upon his memory his neighbour's act, to be made to glow as secret tracings when heat is applied. But are men aware of the numerous objects which have heard and may testify to their former promises to do the will of God? It was in some severe sickness, when the spectre of death seemed to draw nigh, when, begging for reprieve, you said: "If I am spared I will dedicate myself to Him." And the walls of your chamber listened, and now and then repeat it in the stillness of the night. They who watched heard it, and are wondering yet if you have forgotten. Or it was when some sudden horror of doom flashed on you, and you proffered all you had for your life, while billows or tempest or hurrying car or roadside fences heard your cry and occasionally remind you of the pledge! Or, as you sat under the moving influences of the Spirit, and you were sure the acceptable

time for turning to God had come, did you not say: "When I have made my fortune, or gained this office, or reached that age, I will"? And now the fortune is yours, the office has been held, the age has been passed, but your heart is not yet in the Lord's keeping. It is easy to mortgage the future, so unknown, so full of plausible chances and opportunities. Be as fair, friend, with the Lord as with your neighbour, whom you are proud always to have satisfied, for He has waited longer, till you shall pay your vows to the full. (*De Witt S. Clark.*) *The difficulty of serving God*:—I. SOME OF THEIR DIFFICULTY WOULD BE FOUND ON THE SIDE OF GOD. "He is an holy God; He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins" so as to fail to punish them. "He will turn, and do you hurt, and consume you, after that He hath done you good." 1. If Jehovah is to be served at all, He must be served alone. There can be no possible rivalry between Him and any other claimants to be gods. We may think of three things that are ever pressing in our day to be gods with God—the luxury of wealth; self-seeking pleasure; mere mind knowledge. 2. If God is served at all He must be served in righteousness. God will search through and through every form of service offered to Him, and it must be sincere, it must be "clean every whit," or it cannot be acceptable to Him. The service of a holy God must be the service of intention and resolve, not of mere accident. It should be thought about, resolved upon, prayed about, made the most earnest thing in the whole life. II. SOME OF THE DIFFICULTIES WERE FOUND ON THE SIDE OF ISRAEL. "Ye cannot." "Ye are too frail. Ye are too much exposed to the power of temptation. Ye have too serious inclinations to evil. You do not know yourselves, or you would not promise too readily. You do not fully estimate the influences of the past, or you would fear for your future." They who know themselves learn to pray, "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe, and I shall have respect unto Thy commandments." (*The Weekly Pulpit.*) *The holy character of God*:—I. ALTHOUGH THE LORD IS FULL OF COMPASSION AND MERCY, HE IS YET A HOLY AND A JEALOUS GOD. We must beware of attributing to our God any qualities which are inconsistent with those by which He is known to be guided. II. As a necessary consequence of the holy jealousy of God towards wilful sinners THERE ARE CERTAIN CONDITIONS OF MIND IN WHICH HE WILL NOT FORGIVE your transgressions nor your sins, and in which, therefore, ye cannot serve the Lord. The impenitent, the unbelieving, the careless, the presumptuous will be excluded from the blessing. The fact is, that one thing is indispensable to your acceptable service of God; and that is, that you should be in earnest. III. Ask yourselves the question, ARE YOU DESIROUS TO SERVE THE LORD YOUR GOD? (*E. G. Marshall, M.A.*) *God declining first offers of service*:—If there be any one thing true in the Bible, it is that God welcomes the first approach which man makes to Him. Yet here Joshua offers a repulse to men who wish to avow themselves on the side of God. Are we to conclude, then, that the people were insincere? We have no evidence of this, but the reverse, in their subsequent conduct. There must be some reason for the manner in which they are met, and we shall try to discover it. 1. First, however, we shall seek to show that this procedure on the part of God is not so unusual. You may recollect how the band of Gideon was chosen. When the wise men from the East came seeking Christ the star seemed to desert them, and they met with disappointment and perplexity from all their inquiries in Jerusalem. When the Jews, stirred up to expect the coming Messiah, sent messengers to John, in the hope that they had found their desire, "he confessed and denied not, but confessed, I am not the Christ." We cannot forget the strange treatment of the woman of Canaan by the Lord Himself; how she cried after Him, and was not answered, and met at length what appeared a contemptuous rejection. In the same way He acted to the scribe who came to Him with such an unconditional offer of discipleship, "Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest." "This is no common pleasure-walk," was the reply; "the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." There is another way of finding the same result in the Bible. Consider, for example, the view that is given of the character of God. He is presented to us not only as good, and ready to forgive, but as just and righteous—a God who cannot look on sin without displeasure. There are many terrible threatenings, many dreadful judgments against sin and sinners, which have all this language in them: "Ye cannot serve the Lord, for He is an holy God." When we leave Bible representations, and come to the experience of individuals, we meet with many similar illustrations. In regard to the general evidence of the divinity of the Bible, we can see that God has not constructed it on the plan of overpowering the conviction of

any man at first sight. And even when a man has come to the entire conviction that the gospel is Divine, that there is "none other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved but the name of Jesus Christ," he is not assured thereby of perfect peace. 2. Having sought to show that this procedure, on the part of God, is not so unusual, we may now attempt to find some reasons for it. (1) As a first reason we may assign this, that it sifts the true from the false seeker. The gospel comes into the world to be a touchstone of human nature—to be Ithuriel's spear among men. There is enough in it to attract and convince at last every man who has a sense of spiritual need and a desire of spiritual deliverance, but it is presented in such a form as to try whether the soul really possess this, and therefore we may have obstacles of various kinds at the very entrance. It may seem a strange and unworthy thing that such an obstacle should meet a man in the very commencement of such a journey; but, after all, let it be remembered that what makes it an obstacle is the state of heart of the man himself. This further may be said, that no one will be able to complain of any real wrong from such obstacles. The false seeker is not injured, because he never sincerely sought at all. There was no sense of sin's evil, no wish to be saved from it, and till this exists nothing can be sought, and nothing found. The true seeker is not injured, for never was such an one disappointed. (2) Next, it leads the true seeker to examine himself more thoroughly. If a man is accepted, or thinks he is accepted, at once, he takes many things for granted which it would be well for him to inquire into. Very specially is this the case in regard to the nature of sin and the light in which God regards it. The easy complacency with which some talk of pardon and their assurance of it, often springs more from dulness of conscience than strength of faith. The natural result of such a defective view is, that when a man enlists with it in God's service, he does so without any distinct idea of what he is to aim at. He does not see that the gospel binds us to the service of a God of truth and purity, and that only in this way can its blessings be enjoyed. (3) Further, it binds a man to his profession by a stronger sense of consistency. There is a paper of obligations put into our hands to sign, and, when we take the pen, we are bidden read it over again and ponder it, that we may subscribe with clear consciousness of the contents. God will beguile no man into His service by false pretences. (4) Lastly, it educates us to a higher growth and greater capacity of happiness. When we see the wind shaking a young tree, and bending it to the very earth, it may seem to be retarding its rise, but it is furthering it. In the intellectual world a strong man thrives on difficulties. There is no falser method of education than to make all smooth and easy, and remove every stone before the foot touches it. God Himself has hidden the knowledge of His creation in the depths of the sky and the bosom of the earth. He has demanded toil and travail, keen and patient thought, till study has become a weariness to the flesh, in order that man's intellect may rise to its proper stature. It would have been a strange thing if the spiritual world had been an exception. Read the manner in which such men as Paul and Luther and Pascal passed through the gate of life, not easily and complacently, but with fears within and fightings without, and you will see how God made them grow such men as they became. And, though we are far distant from that mark, very humble plants in the garden of God beside those great trees of righteousness, yet, if we are to rise to anything, it must be in the same way, not by soft indulgent nurture, but by endurance of hardship, and pressing on against repulse. If there be some who have been seeking God, as they think, in vain, and have given up the search as fruitless, what can we do but urge them to renew the application? Come, as these Israelites did, with the words, "Nay; but we will serve the Lord." I can suppose a twofold class who have ceased to seek. There are some, perhaps, with a feeling of wounded pride or petulance. They say they have done their best, and it is useless. They have gone through a course of inquiry and search and prayer, and they have found neither comfort nor hope. Would it not be worth the while of such to reconsider this part of it, and to see whether some of the blame may not lie with themselves? There may, however, be another class who have left off seeking God, from very different motives, not in petulance, but in despondency, who have not so much turned their back on search, as sat down, wearied and hopeless, in the midst of it. Let them consider that they have to do with One who will not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax; that the heart of God is with them; that the darkness and death of Christ, now changed to the strength of intercession, are on their side, and all those heavenly promises which are yea and amen in Him, and which, as bright and as many as the stars in their courses, all fight for them. Let them

think of Jacob's wrestling, of David's tears, of Paul's threefold prayer, of the woman of Canaan, &c. (*John Ker, D.D.*) *Moral inability*:—I. THE CERTAINTY OF THE TRUTH THAT UNRENEWED MEN CANNOT SERVE GOD. 1. The nature of God renders perfect service impossible to depraved men. 2. The best they could render as unrenewed men would lack heart and intent, and therefore must be unacceptable. 3. The law of God is perfect, comprehensive, spiritual, far-reaching: who can hope to fulfil it? 4. The carnal mind is inclined to self-will, self-seeking, lust, enmity, pride, and all other evils. 5. Let men try to be perfectly obedient. They will not try it. They argue for their ability, but they are loth enough to exert it. II. THE DISCOURAGEMENT WHICH ARISES FROM THIS TRUTH. 1. It discourages men from an impossible task. 2. It discourages from a ruinous course. 3. It discourages reliance upon ceremonies or any other outward religiousness, by assuring men that these cannot suffice. 4. It discourages from every other way of self-salvation, and thus shuts men up to faith in the Lord Jesus. Nothing better can befall them (Gal. ii. 22, 23). III. THE NECESSITIES OF WHICH WE ARE REMINDED BY THIS TRUTH. 1. Unregenerate men, before you can serve God you need—(1) A new nature. (2) Reconciliation. (3) Acceptance. (4) Continual aid, to keep you in the way when once you are in it (1 Sam. ii. 9; Jude 24, 25). 2. If you cannot serve God as you are, yet trust Him as He manifests Himself in Christ Jesus; and do this just as you are. 3. This will enable you to serve Him on better principles. 4. This change of your nature will be effected by the Holy Spirit, who will come and dwell in you. 5. This will fit you for heaven, where "His servants shall serve Him." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Moral inability*:—Their inability was wholly of the moral kind. They could not do it because they were not disposed to do it, just as it is said of Joseph's brethren (Gen. xxxvii. 4) that they "could not speak peaceably unto him," so strong was their personal dislike to him. But an inability arising from this source was obviously inexcusable, on the same grounds that a drunkard's inability to master his propensity for strong drink is inexcusable. In like manner the "cannot" of the impenitent sinner, in regard to the performance of his duty, is equally inexcusable. (*George Bush.*) *Entire change needed*:—A man deeply exercised about his soul was conversing with a friend on the subject, when the friend said, "Come at once to Jesus, for He will take away all your sins from your back." "Yes, I am aware of that"; said the other; "but what about my back?" I find I have not only sins to take away, but there is myself; what is to be done with that? And there is not only my back, but hands and feet, and head and heart are such a mass of iniquity that it's myself I want to get rid of before I can get peace. (*British Evangelist.*) *Discouragement useful*:—Discouragements, rightly put, encourage. The best way to deepen and confirm good resolutions which have been too swiftly and inconsiderately formed is to state very plainly all the difficulty of keeping them. The hand that seems to repel often most powerfully attracts. There is no better way of turning a somewhat careless "we will" into a persistent "nay, but we will," than to interpose a "ye cannot." Many a boy has been made a sailor by the stories of hardships which his parents have meant as dissuasives. Joshua here is doing exactly what Jesus Christ did often. He refused glib vows because He desired whole hearts. "Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest!" was answered by no recognition of the speaker's enthusiasm, and by no word of pleasure or invitation, but by the apparently cold repulse: "Foxes have holes, birds of the air roosting-places; but the Son of Man has not where to lay His head. That is what you are offering to share. Do you stand to your words?" He will have no soldiers enlisted under false pretences. They shall know the full difficulties and trials which they must meet; and if, knowing these, they still are willing to take His yoke upon them, then how exuberant and warm the welcome which He gives! There is a real danger that this side of the evangelist's work should be overlooked in the earnestness with which the other side is done. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Reasons why man will not serve God*:—Dr. Tucker, Bishop of Eastern Equatorial Africa, said: "In our journey we came to the country of Taita. The people of Taita are not a very interesting people, and are adverse to Christianity. I visited a chief there, and asked him why they were so unwilling for Christian people to settle in their midst, and I said, 'If I sent you a couple of missionaries would you not be glad to have them?' 'No.' 'Why?' I asked. The chief replied, 'If they come and settle among us they tell us that stealing cattle and fighting are not right.' 'Yes!' I replied. 'Well, that would never do; for we are very fond of stealing cattle, and also of fighting.' It was a most straightforward reason, and I think if many of the heathen at home would be as honest in giving

the reasons why they will not come to Christ they would say much the same. 'If I came to Christ I should require to quit getting drunk, and I am very fond of getting drunk,'" &c.

Ver. 20. **If ye forsake the Lord . . . He will turn.**—*Mercies abused, the precursors of wrath*:—I. THE REASONABLENESS OF EXPECTING THAT ABUSED MERCIES MUST LEAD TO MORE AGGRAVATED PUNISHMENT. We see this clearly in the history of Israel. Their career as a nation was marked by perfidy and ingratitude; at almost every step of their progress we find them in rebellion against the Most High—"forsaking the Lord, and serving strange gods." And how did God deal with them when they thus acted? Is it not the case that He scourged them, and caused them to suffer punishment? Look at the plagues that befel them in the desert; look at the slaughters which God permitted them to experience in warfare with their enemies. And who can survey the subsequent history of the Jews, and not read a fulfilment of the threatening contained in our text? And what we are desirous you should gather from the foregoing observations is mainly this, that no experience of good at the hands of the Almighty affords warrant to expect that future disobedience will not be visited with righteous severity. "If ye forsake the Lord and serve strange gods, then He will turn and do you hurt and consume you, after that He hath done you good." II. THE JUSTICE OF THE DEALING WHICH IS REFERRED TO IN THE THREATENING BEFORE US. Now it will be admitted that every reason was given Israel to expect the continuance of the Divine favour and protection. We think it easily to be perceived that one main purpose of the Almighty in the calling of Israel as a nation was to maintain upon earth, through means of that race, the pure knowledge of Himself; to afford a witness to the unity of Jehovah, and against idolatry; to secure glory to Himself by the exhibition, on the part of this people, of a consistent obedience. Surely, then, if this purpose was, through the nation's profligacy and disobedience, altogether thwarted, if all the resources which God gave them of national strength were abused and corrupted, indeed it were strange not to perceive that their conduct in this respect released every presumed obligation "to do them good," and in short vindicates to the letter the justice of the warning, "If ye forsake the Lord, and serve strange gods, then He will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that He hath done you good." And now, to take a more comprehensive range, from looking at the case of the Jewish people let us turn to that of mankind in general. Does it appear that God can be just in the apportionment of unmitigated wrath to mankind, notwithstanding all the manifestations of His determination to do them good? There are two grand exhibitions to be met with of God's merciful intention towards mankind at large, to do them good. The first of these is furnished by creation, and the second by redemption. Our object of inquiry is simply this: whether the display of God's love in creating or redeeming mankind offers any reason to conclude that, in harmony with His justice, He cannot "turn and do them hurt, and consume them." To begin with creation: no man can doubt that his creation is the proof of a purpose on God's part to "do him good." Beyond all question this purpose was man's happiness, but then his happiness was to consist in assimilation to the Godhead: and if upon man devolve the guilt of having voluntarily destroyed and renounced that similitude, where is the inconsistency of the dealing, should God "turn and do him hurt, and consume him"? The nobler the faculties wherewith he was endowed the brighter the evidence of God's purpose to "do him good," the stronger then seem to me the reasons wherefore wrath should be executed upon those by whom the faculties are abused and the evidence slighted. We turn, lastly, to the manifestation of God's goodness as displayed in redemption. There have been those who have argued—redemption is the evidence of a love so surpassing, they can never believe God will sentence to destruction those whom He has redeemed at such cost. "The method of our atonement involves an expenditure of such wisdom and mercy, that how can we conceive of the Almighty as permitting its objects finally to perish?" Alas! to reason thus is equally, as in the former instances we have adduced, to overlook one main purpose of God in the scheme of human redemption. Is it not strange that men who have been made the objects of a sacrifice so costly should regard it so lightly and requite it so coldly? We may wonder that redeemed sinners should perish, but is it not more wonderful that redeemed sinners should refuse to be saved? Again, let us revert to the purpose of God in redemption. Indeed it was to bless the whole earth; it was to ransom humanity from the bondage of evil, and to exalt it to transcendent felicity. But

after all, throughout every dealing of God with His intelligent creatures, we may discover the purpose to treat them as responsible beings, free to reject the overtures of His mercy. Now, redemption is offered upon certain terms; man is required to repent and to believe in order to be saved. It is no part of redemption to offer him an entrance into heaven irrespective of a moral fitness, to render him meet for heaven's enjoyments; and in the acquisition of this moral fitness man is required to co-operate with the Divine Spirit. He can refuse to profit by what God hath done for him, and thus prove himself a despiser of the love which is so unsearchably great. He can resolutely withstand the design of the Almighty in redemption, namely, that he should glorify God, both in his body and soul; and, I ask, if it be possible for Him to act thus, is there not justice in the sentence which awards him to suffer in spite of all the declared willingness of God to do him good? (*Bp. R. Bickersteth.*) *Christians solemnly reminded of their obligations:*—I. THAT WE ARE UNDER OBLIGATIONS TO SERVE THE LORD FROM OUR OWN CHOICE, OR VOLUNTARY ENGAGEMENTS. Here I would premise that though voluntary obligations, taken upon ourselves by our own act, have something of a peculiar force in them, yet they are not the only obligations we are under to serve the Lord. We are bound to be His servants whether we will or not. His character as our creator, our preserver, and benefactor, and as a being of supreme excellency, give Him the most firm and indisputable right to our obedience. But though we are all under obligations to God, independent upon, and prior to, our own consent, yet there are a class of obligations which we have personally, and by our own act, taken upon ourselves; and in the breach of these we are guilty of more direct and aggravated perjury. II. TO INQUIRE HOW AND WHEN, OR IN WHAT RESPECTS, AND AT WHAT PERIODS OF TIME, WE ARE WITNESSES AGAINST OURSELVES THAT WE HAVE CHOSEN THE LORD TO SERVE HIM. 1. You yourselves are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord to be your God. You know and confess that you have been dedicated to God in baptism; and some of you know it was your own act and deed when capable of choosing for yourselves. You also know in your own consciences that you are often present at the table of the Lord, and there you renew your covenant with God afresh. 2. You are witnesses against one another that you have chosen the Lord to serve Him. You have seen the transactions that have passed between God and you in His house; you have seen some baptized themselves, some presenting their children to baptism, and so renewing their own covenant with God; some sealing their religious engagements at the Lord's table. (*President Davies.*)

Ver. 25. **Joshua made a covenant.**—*The covenant of Joshua:*—"That day" was a very notable day in the annals of the children of Israel; its transactions might well be recorded in the volume of the book and engraven on the monumental stone. All the favours which God had promised to their fathers while yet they languished in bondage in Egypt had been now fulfilled; the promised land was theirs. God had given them rest in all their borders. In the meantime their captain, who had so often led them to victory, waxed helpless and old; he felt that there gathered around him the mists and crept over him the shadow of the coming change. He summoned the tribes of Israel, therefore, to meet him in Shechem; and they muster largely, for they feel it to be a great day, and suspect they are about to listen to their leader's parting charge. He recounts God's providential dealings with them, and seeks by the memory of the past to inspire their vows of fidelity and allegiance. The warrior heart is still in the old man eloquent, but he wars not now against advancing hosts, but against rebellious minds. There is yet fire in his battle-cry, but it summons to self-conquest. There is glory yet upon his brow, but it is not the lustre of his former achievements, but the radiance of the nearing heaven already gathering to crown its hero. He has often led the people to victory; he will confirm them in piety now, that he may but briefly precede them into the recompense of the reward. He knew full well that their only danger sprang from themselves, that there was no danger to them, if they were but obedient and faithful, from the shock even of an embattled world; and with earnest love to God, and with deep knowledge of the human heart, he delivers his final and his impressive appeal. He warns them to count the cost, in order that there may be a more solemn and decided consecration of themselves to God. Then, receiving their reiterated vows, he makes a covenant with them, and stamps it with a sacramental and with an authoritative value, and sets it up for a statute and for an ordinance in Shechem. This seems to have been the last public act of his life, and

then, weary for the rest of which Canaan was but the significant shadow, he went serenely into heaven. First, as to the nature of this covenant. I need not remind you that the Israelites were the chosen people of God—chosen to be the recipients of His bounty—chosen to be the witnesses of His unity—chosen to enter solemn protests against the abominable idolatries of the nations around. For the fulfilment of these ends Jehovah had interposed for His Israel in many signal deliverances and blessings. They were not a people, and He had given them a great name; He had broken for them the yoke of the oppressor; He had made them heir to an inheritance which they knew not, neither did their fathers know; He made the ocean a pavement for them, the heavens a storehouse, and the rock a fountain of waters; He had successively overthrown all their enemies in their sight, and by many a convincing illustration had stamped the seal of faithfulness upon every promise He had made. And yet they had very frequently rebelled. When trials came they turned recreant from faith and hope; when they were summoned to hazardous duty they shrank, like cowards, from its discharge; and they even formed unholy leagues with the people whom they were sent to overthrow, and adopted their idolatries with an enthusiasm the more reckless because of its perversion from a purer faith and worship. There was need, therefore, that they should be reminded of their duty, and that they should be urged, by all the solemnity of statute and of ordinance, to give themselves afresh unto God. Are not their circumstances yours? The burden of the summons which Joshua made unto the people was that they should serve the Lord. This was also the essence of the covenant, that they should serve the Lord. And, allowing for the differences of mission and local circumstances, there is an identity in the covenant which I want to make with you to-day. I just mention two points. In the first place, then, Joshua could not have served the Lord if he had neglected the Divinely-appointed institution of sacrifice. Although the Mosaic and the Christian economy differ in many things, they are alike in this, that the foundation of each of them is a recognition of sin. The only other part of the covenant which it is necessary for me to bring before you is that Joshua could not have served the Lord, nor any Israelite in the camp, if he had not strictly obeyed the ten commandments of the law. The great principles of morality are the same in every age, and these precepts of the former time, with a new spirit put into them by the exposition of Jesus on the mount, are binding on our consciences to-day. In entire union with Christ I have obtained power to obey—that is the first thing. We cannot obey until we have got a new heart put into us; we have no strength in human nature's old heart to obey the commandments of God; but having by our union with Christ obtained power to obey, that obedience should be sincerely and heartily rendered. A sincere seeker after the will of God will not choose among the commandments, will not obey them just so far as they chime in with corrupt desire and contravene no darling and yet vicious inclination of the soul; he will seek to obey them in the universality of their behests, in the breadth and grandeur of their deep design. I do not think it necessary to go further. If these points of the covenant are granted me, that is all I ask. Come to Christ, and keep His law, and you will be Christians fit for earth, and Christians fit for heaven. I cannot at large mention the arguments by which this covenant was commended. I rather, therefore, prefer to confine my thoughts to the faculty to which the minister makes his appeal. Joshua evidently regarded every man among the Israelites around him as invested with the royal attribute of personal freedom. Beneath each kindling eye and swarthy brow he sees an active reason and a manly soul. He speaks not to those who are of necessity impelled—who are circumscribed by a despotism of surroundings—from whose shackles there is no liberation; he speaks to men, to freemen, to freemen with power to choose the right—with power to prefer the wrong: "Choose you this day." You can choose your service. Oh! I would remind you of the many blessings which God has heaped upon you from the beginning—how your life has sparkled in the light of His loving-kindness. It was He who kindled for you all the endearments of affection and lit up all the joyfulness of home; it was He that warded off peril and environed you with the restraints that have preserved you from the grosser vices and inspired you with the impulse of every good desire. His Son died to redeem you, and lives to intercede that the benefits of His redemption may be yours. His Spirit fans the faint impression and kindles the holy desire, and takes of the precious things of Christ—those precious, those holy motives, and inspiring hopes—and shows them unto you. There is not a temporal mercy, there is not an intellectual enjoyment,

there is not a spiritual mercy, for which you are not indebted to Him. And even now He comes, not forcing you to love Him, but inviting, entreating, imploring, adjuring, "My son, My daughter, give Me thy heart." (*W. M. Punshon, D.D.*)

Vers. 26, 27. **Joshua . . . took a great stone, and set it up there under an oak, that was by the sanctuary of the Lord.**—*The devout soul and nature:*—Solemnity of occasion. Joshua, dying, calls upon the nation to "choose whom you will serve." Here we have—1. A wise effort to impress and perpetuate religious resolutions. 2. A fine impersonation of material nature. I. THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGIOUS RESOLUTIONS. They are worthy of perpetual remembrance. The world has monuments of earthquakes, wars, deaths; but how few of devout resolutions! II. THE HIGHEST USE OF MATERIAL OBJECTS. Without actually setting up material objects, nature might be appropriated in her different manifestations as types of God's character, and as mementos of events in the religious history of an individual or a family. III. THE MOST SOLEMN ASPECTS OF NATURE. Who dares to say that nature cannot hear or speak? Who shall say, at the last, what nature, after her long silence, shall reveal? Take heed what you do and say: stones may hear without a Joshua's invocation. (*Homilist.*) *The Christian use of churches:*— We can easily conceive the association of thought with which Joshua and Israel contemplated the stone which they set up in Shechem. However rough it might be and shapeless, it had for them a solemn character; it had something approaching to personality and the power of testimony. "It," said Joshua, "hath heard all the words of the Lord which He spake unto us"; not, of course, literally, but in the minds and recollections of those who regarded it as a pledge and token of the vow and covenant made betwixt them and God. And we may well conceive that such a silent, unchangeable witness retained for years, and perhaps for generations, its effect on the people of Israel, even in their downward course which, we too well know, shortly followed. To it the servants of God, struggling against the idolatry and pollution of their age, would bring their little ones, and teach them the words which it heard, and of which it was a testimony, and repeat each for himself their dying captain's confession, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Many a tender hand, laid on its cool surface, may have throbbed with generous emotion and holy zeal; many a thoughtful youth and maiden of Israel may have heard from it a sermon, which issued in holy endurance and heroic resolve. And we, have not we too set up our stone of testimony? have not these walls, dead materials gathered from the slime of the earth and the bosom of the rock, within these few days assumed for us a solemnity of which, in the laws of our thought, they can never be divested? Have they not heard all the words which the Lord our God hath spoken to us, and all that we have spoken to Him? Have we not begun a new course, entered on a fresh iteration of our covenant with God, of which these stones are a witness, a silent but ineffaceable witness—a witness through the ages of time—a witness at the solemn day of judgment? If this pillar of testimony, set up in the midst of our homes, raised with so much self-denying effort, inaugurated with so many tears of joy, is to witness only cold hearts and feeble hands, and formal Sundays, and ungodly weeks, oh shame unto us henceforward—nay, woe unto us, for God will look upon it and judge; and as we have received, so will He at last require of us. These latter words—as a note of passage—lead me on to speak of not only the similarity, but the difference also, between Joshua's stone of witness and ours. I deeply feel that this your church is, as the stone in Shechem was, a witness between you and God. But it is so in a far more solemn sense, in a far wider and deeper meaning, than that could ever be. That stone was a mere passive witness; by standing where it did, it gave a permanence to the fact of the covenant there made. It was merely, as our Nelson's pillar or our Wellington statues, a memorial. And this our church is likewise; a memorial of His great mercies and of our feeble gratitude; a memorial that a Christian congregation has in it anew entered into covenant with Him. But it is also far more than this. It is an active witness between you and God. The sermons which it preaches are not merely those which associations of thought might suggest; they are active, positive, spoken declarations of God's will, ever renewed and energising. Its testimony is not only that of a memorial of the past; it is an ever-welling fountain of Divine knowledge, telling of Christ and His salvation. Thus considered, then, what is the use, what is the office, of this our Church? Briefly (but how much is contained in these words) to provide those who dwell in this thickly-peopled neighbourhood with the public means of grace. Undoubtedly, the first means of grace are, prayer and

praise. But there are others, standing in the very first rank of importance, viz., the Word and the Sacraments. Nor should I omit, in speaking of our new church as a witness for God, the important testimony which is borne by every church in the succession of her services throughout the Christian year. Here you will each year accompany our blessed Lord "from His poor cradle to His bitter cross"; here you will witness His burial, and His glorious resurrection and ascension, and the fulfilment of the promise of the Father in the descent of the Spirit, and will adore with holy joy on that crowning festival of Trinity the whole Three Persons in the One Godhead, covenanted in the work of our salvation. Such are some few of the blessings which you may expect from your church; such some few of the testimonies which it will lift up among you for God and His work. Can I pass on without a word of exhortation to you that you thwart not such blessings—that you let not such testimonies be given against yourselves? Oh, love your church! Throng its aisles from week to week, as to-day. (*Dean Alford.*)

Vers. 29–33. Joshua . . . died.—*The burials of distinguished saints*:—Within the compass of the five last verses of this book three deaths are recorded and three burial-places signalised by the deposited remains of the most distinguished saints. After all we have seen in Canaan, let us visit the sepulchre of Joshua. The short record given may be viewed as a simple, unvarnished memento, or monumental inscription (vers. 29, 30). The place of his interment was in the lot of his inheritance, and may remind us how soon the seat of life becomes the repository of death. Short had been the date of his settlement: an hundred years before he obtained rest, and then but ten before he must lie down in his grave, not again to rise till the heavens be no more. What can be a greater or more convincing proof of still higher and nobler ends of Providence than any contained within the limits of this life, when even the most distinguished of God's family, the most exemplary and useful of His children, are not suffered to continue by reason of death, but are early removed from the happiest scenes on earth! It bespeaks the greatness of man, and the more exalted provisions of glory the infinite goodness of God has secured in another world. The designs of His grace are too exalted, and the displays of His power too wondrous, to centre in any earthly lot, though equal in beauty and richness to Eden, when as yet the seat of innocence, perfection, and love. Timnath-serah was still the portion of his lot, even in death. Where he lived in possession, there he lay in possession, nor left any commandment, as Jacob and Joseph, for removal. It is remarkable how much this was the desire of the faithful, and of what moment, though not in itself, yet in its typical regards, they viewed a burying-place in the promised land. It was as if they thought upon the interests of their sleeping dust as well as the felicity of their undying spirits, and in still retaining their inheritance, even in a state of death, would claim for their bodies a share in the life to come; for He who had so richly provided for the one as well as for the other, in an inheritance entirely typical, would not have so essential a part of our redeemed nature for ever the prey of worms. Where the believer now rests, in what bed matters little, for Jesus is the resurrection and the life of all His people. A short inscription, which, as a plain monumental record of his character and age, claims in the solemn reflections here excited a moment's pause: "Servant of the Lord died, being an hundred and ten years old." What an important connection of age and dignity! What an honour to lie down at last under this character! This is the highest style of man. What he had done, and all which this book recorded of the mighty conquests achieved, was not here to be named; for in everything he had been but a servant, and only the willing instrument of Omnipotence. The title was all that need appear, or that any who know their own insignificance would desire. It is enough that "they rest from their labours, and their works do follow." Joshua and all the saints, from infancy to age, through the long lapse of time, shall retain the record of truth, and in the character in which they died rise the servants of God. As now in the end of life it is said, "The servant of the Lord died, being an hundred and ten years old," so then shall commence the history of eternity. The servant of the Lord arose the beginning, the first day, of immortality. From the tomb of Joshua let us go to the burying-place of Joseph: it is in the same inheritance, and not far distant. It is remarkable in the connected record of these burials that Joshua should have lived just the same number of years as this his distinguished ancestor, and that though not buried in the same spot, yet in the same inheritance, and not far distant from the same period. Never was there so singular a funeral: two hundred years dead before interment. Many, we may

think, crowded to see it, and if the Church in heaven could have been witnesses, the sight must have yielded pleasure; for it was the burial of faith. And did it reach the glorified saint, the spirit long made perfect, or could he have looked down upon the purchased spot of his father, the desired resting-place of his bones, he would have known the fidelity of his brethren, and have rejoiced in the end of his faith. It became the inheritance of the children of Joseph, though he had stood a stranger in the land, when, in obedience to the dying request of his father, he buried him in the grave which himself was said to have digged (Gen. l. 5). How remarkable that the place where Joseph obtained interment, and where at length he was gathered to his fathers, should turn out the inheritance of his sons; and that, though separated many years from his father in life, he should, as he, rest in Canaan, and find a grave even in his own inheritance. Oh! it was a sweet privilege to be entombed in his own inheritance, and to hold a place with both his sons and his fathers in what bespoke the common hope and claim of all the faithful. It was a choice spot, and where any saint would have wished to have been laid, and there to have rested in the hope of all that was, in the perfection of the Church and close of time, to open in the grandeur of the resurrection, when, as the heirs of promise, and the sons of immortality, they would rise to claim a fairer, brighter, and more lasting inheritance above the skies. The ground was a purchase (Gen. xxiii. 16, 17). And now the purchase of Jacob became the burying-place of Joseph. The heavenly land is spoken of as a purchased possession, and that in no part ever to become a burying-place, but the seat of endless life and felicity to the whole Church of God. But, oh! what has been the purchase, what paid for it, by the eternal Son of God! One more burying-place within this inheritance is pointed out: "And Eleazar the son of Aaron died," &c. As situated near Shiloh, this was, probably for its convenience, assigned as the residence of the high priest. We see the inheritances of Israel fast changing into the burying-places of the dead. It was not the land of immortality, not that state of being of which it is said, "There shall be no more death," &c. In Canaan all must die, as well princes, priests, and rulers, as others; but in heaven none die: there natural evils and moral pollutions are for ever removed. (*W. Seaton.*) **Israel served the Lord.**—*Faithful adherence to engagements:*—The men of that generation remained faithful to their engagements. These men, who had themselves "known all the works of the Lord that He had done for Israel," in bringing them into Canaan and in subduing the hostile nations, never forsook His worship for the worship of the idols of the land, of whose boasted power they had witnessed so signal a discomfiture. The character and admonitions of Joshua were not forgotten. His disinterestedness, his energy, his singleness of purpose, his faith, had left a track of glory behind, as the sun, after he has sunk below the horizon, flings glorious hues and golden light over all the western sky. The men who had themselves seen the conquests of Joshua would have been doubly inexcusable if they had forsaken the worship of Jehovah. Like the disciple Thomas, because they had seen they had believed. How, indeed, could it have been otherwise? How could they, standing there in Shechem, —the site of Abraham's altar, of Jacob's well, of Joseph's tomb, of Joshua's victories—refuse to believe in the Divine calling of the people Israel? (*L. H. Wiseman, M.A.*)

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF JUDGES.

Title and place of the Book in the Canon.—The title, "Judges," or "The Book of Judges," which the book bears in the Jewish and Christian Bibles, is given to it because it relates the exploits of a succession of Israelite leaders and champions who, in the book itself as well as in other parts of the Old Testament, are called Judges. The significance of the Hebrew word is, however, much wider than that of the Greek *κριτής*, the Latin *judex*, or the English "judge." The verb *shaphat* is not only *judicare*, but *vindicare*, both in the sense of "defend, deliver," and in that of "avenge, punish." The participle *shophet* is not only *judex*, but *vindex*, and is not infrequently synonymous with "deliverer." Again, as the administration of justice was, in times of peace, the most important function of the chieftain or king, the noun is sometimes equivalent to "ruler," and the verb signifies "rule, govern." In this sense it is most natural to take it in the lists of minor Judges (*e.g.*, Judg. x. 2, 3, *cf.* xii. 7, 8, 11, 14; xv. 20; 1 Sam. iv. 18, vii. 15, *cf.* viii. 20). The title, "Book of Judges," was in all probability meant by those who prefixed it to the book to correspond to that of the Book of Kings; the judges were the succession of rulers and defenders of Israel before the hereditary monarchy, as the kings were afterwards. In the Hebrew Bible the Book of Judges stands in the first division of the Prophets, the Prophetic Histories (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings) which narrate continuously the history of Israel from the invasion of Canaan to the fall of Jerusalem (B.C. 586). In the Greek Bible Ruth is appended to it, sometimes under one title (*κριταί*), sometimes under its own name; and in manuscripts, the Pentateuch, together with Joshua, Judges, and Ruth, frequently forms a codex (Octateuch). In the history of Israel before the exile, Judges covers the time from the close of the period of conquest and occupation with the death of Joshua to the beginning of the struggle with the Philistines in the days of Eli. A better division, from our point of view, would have been the establishment of the kingdom of Saul. There is some evidence that, in one at least of the older histories which our author had before him, Eli and Samuel were reckoned among the judges (1 Sam. iv. 18, vii. 15); but as Samuel is the central figure in the story of the founding of the kingdom, it was not unnatural to begin a new book with his birth. The character of the two works shows conclusively that Judges was not composed by the author of Samuel; the peculiar religious interpretation of the history which is impressed so strongly on Judges is almost entirely lacking in Samuel. (*Prof. G. F. Moore.*)

Date of Compilation of the Book.—Its authorship—or rather, the authorship of any part of it, for it is drawn from more than one source—is unknown, and its final redaction, as is shown by the presence of Deuteronomic and other elements, cannot have taken place until after the exile. Its composite character is shown by the fact that it has two beginnings (see i. 1 and ii. 6). The main section of the book, extending from ii. 6 to xvi. 31, consists of an apparently consecutive narrative, grouped round six principal judges—Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah,

and Samson—the intervals being filled with the history of Gideon's son, Abimelech, and references, more or less brief, to six minor heroes—Shamgar, Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon. The religious pragmatism of this narrative is obvious; the history falls into running cycles, all corresponding to the scheme indicated at the outset (chap. ii. 11–23). The apparently consecutive character of the narrative disappears when its chronological data are carefully analysed; from these we find that the chronology of the section is based on two artificial alternative schemes, either of which, but not both together, can be reconciled with the datum in 1 Kings vi. 1. Thus the narrative of the greater judges was originally separate from that of the minor ones. The religious standpoint of this main section, taken along with other points of internal evidence, shows that in the main it must have been composed about the eighth century B.C. There are signs of Deuteronomic redaction, however; but, on the other hand, the section contains elements that carry us much further back than the century named—such elements, *e.g.*, as the Song of Deborah, and the history of Abimelech. Of the remaining portions of the book, i. 1 to ii. 5 is relatively old—older than the Book of Joshua, which relates to the same subject, the conquest of Canaan, but treats it in a much later manner. The closing section of the book is made up of two unconnected and independent narratives of very different dates. The history of Micah and the Danites (xvii. 1 to xviii. 31) is a piece of very old history: that of the Levite and the Benjamites is considered by Wellhausen to be post-exilic, and in any case must be regarded as comparatively very late. (*Chambers's Encyclopædia.*)

THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE BOOK.—The only guide to the chronology is to be found in the genealogies which span the period, for there are no materials in the book itself from which to construct an accurate rendering of the number of years between the death of Joshua and the commencement of Eli's judgeship. There are ten genealogies in Scripture given with more or less completeness, which include the interval of time between the exodus and David. (1) That of David himself (Ruth iv. 18–22; 1 Chron. ii. 10–15; Matt. i. 4–6; Luke iii. 31, 32). (2) That of Zadok the High Priest (1 Chron. vi. 4–8, 50–53; Ezra vii. 2–5). (3) That of Abiathar (made up of different notices of his ancestors in 1 Sam. up to Eli, and by assuming the same number of generations between Eli and Ithamar as there are between Jehoram, the grandfather of Samuel, and Assir, son of Korah). (4) That of Saul (by putting together 1 Sam. ix. 1, 1 Chron. vii. 6–8, ix. 35–39). (5) That of Heman (1 Chron. vi. 33). (6) That of Ahimoth (1 Chron. vi. 25). (7) That of Asaph (1 Chron. vi. 39.) (8) That of Ethan (1 Chron. vi. 44). (9) That of Zabad (1 Chron. ii. 25–36, xi. 41.) (10) The succession of the kings of Edom (Gen. xxxvi. 31–38, 1 Chron. i. 43–50). Of these ten genealogies, of which those of David and Zadok especially have the appearance of being drawn up in their respective lifetimes, and carry every conviction of their completeness, and those of Saul and the Edomitish kings have also all likelihood of being complete, only one, that of Heman, differs, in appearance even, from the others in length; but this *apparent* difference is removed, and the line of Heman brought to the same length as the other nine, when we observe that seven, or rather nine names from another genealogy (that of Ahimoth, vers. 22–25) have apparently been interpolated bodily between Elkanah in ver. 35 and Korah in ver. 37. The evidence, then, of these ten genealogies concurs in assigning an average of between seven and eight generations to the time from the entrance into Canaan to the commencement of David's reign, which would make up from 240 to 260 years. Deducting thirty years for Joshua, thirty for Samuel, and forty for the reign of Saul (Acts xiii. 21), in all 100 years, we have from 140 to 160 years left for the events related in the Book of Judges. This is a short time, no doubt, but quite sufficient, when it is remembered that many of the *rests* and *servitudes* there related are not successive, but synchronise; and that no great dependence can be placed on the recurring eighty, forty, and twenty years, whenever they are not in harmony with historical probability. . . . The narratives which have the strongest appearance of synchronising are those of the Moabite, Ammonite, and Amalekite servitude (Judg. iii. 12–30), which lasted eighteen years, and was closely connected with a Philistine invasion (iii. 31); of the Ammonite servitude which lasted eighteen years, and was also closely connected with a Philistine invasion (x. 7, 8); and of the Midianite and Amalekite servitude which lasted seven years (vi. 1), all three of which terminated in a complete expulsion and destruction of their enemies by the three leaders, Ehud, Jephthah, and Gideon, heading respectively the Benjamites, the Manassites, and the northern tribes, and the tribes beyond Jordan: the conduct

of the Ephraimites as related in chap. viii. 1, xii. 1, being an additional very strong feature of resemblance in the two histories of Gideon and Jephthah. The forty years of Philistine servitude mentioned in Judg. xiii. 1 seem to have embraced the last twenty years of Eli's judgeship and the first twenty of Samuel's, and terminated with Samuel's victory at Ebenezer; and if so, Samson's judgeship of twenty years also coincided in part with Samuel's. The long *rests* of forty and eighty years spoken of as following the victories of Othniel, Barak, Ehud may very probably have synchronised in whole or in part. If the numerals are correct, and the rests are successive, we should have no less than 160 years (40+80+40) without a single recorded incident in any part of the twelve tribes, which must be deemed improbable. (*Lord Arthur Hervey.*)

The Object of the Book.—In this sacred history we are authoritatively taught what the moral causes were, in the instances recorded in it, which led to the fall and rising again of Israel. The book is a record of the righteousness, the faithfulness, and the mercy of God. Again, as the preservation of the Israelitish people through this troublesome and perilous portion of their existence was not an accident, but a part of God's eternal plan for the salvation of mankind, so is the record of it, and of the means by which it was brought about, an integral portion of those Holy Scriptures which were given by inspiration to God. This book exhibits the wondrous strength which man acquires from good and glorious works when his faith lays fast hold of the faithfulness of God. It exhibits, too, the fearful perils which they incur who seek for safety in weak and indolent compliance with the demands of sin, instead of in a bold and uncompromising adherence to the law of Christ. It teaches us by heart-stirring examples to "fight the good fight of faith," and "lay hold on eternal life." It holds out to us in figures the mighty victory of Christ over all His foes, and so stimulates our own hope of sharing His victory, and being partakers of His kingdom, when all enemies are put under His feet. (*Ibid.*)

Contents of the Book.—The Book consists of three parts: i. 1–ii. 5; ii. 6–xvi. 31; xvii.–xxi.

(1) i. 1–ii. 5. A brief account of the conquests and settlements of the Israelite tribes in Canaan. i. 1–21. The southern tribes: Judah, Caleb, the Kenites, Simeon, Benjamin. i. 22–29. The central tribes: Joseph (Manasseh, Ephraim). i. 30–33. The northern tribes: Zebulun, Asher, Naphtali. i. 34, 35. Dan's settlement in the west. i. 36. The southern border. i. 1–5. The angel of Yahweh reproves the Israelites for sparing the inhabitants of the land, and foretells the consequences.

(2) ii. 6–xvi. 31. The history of Israel in the days of the Judges. ii. 6–iii. 6. *Introduction:* The religious interpretation and judgment of the whole period as a recurring cycle of defection from Yahweh, subjugation, and deliverance—The nations which Yahweh left in Palestine. iii. 6–xvi. 31. *The stories of the Judges and their heroic deeds.* iii. 7–11. Othniel delivers Israel from Cushan-rishathaim, King of Aram-naharaim. iii. 12–30. Ehud kills Eglon, King of Moab, and liberates Israel. iii. 31. Shamgar kills six hundred Philistines. iv. Deborah and Barak deliver Israel from the Canaanites; the defeat and death of Sisera. v. Triumphal ode, celebrating this victory. vi.–viii. Gideon rids Israel of the Midianites. ix. Abimelech, the son of Gideon, King of Shechem. x. 1–5. Tolah; Jair. x. 6–18. The moral of the history repeated and enforced; preface to a new period of oppression. xi. 1–xii. 7. Jephthah delivered Gilead from the Ammonites; he punishes the Ephraimites. xii. 8–15. Ibzan; Elon; Abdon. xiii–xvi. The adventures of Samson, and the mischief he does the Philistines.

(3) xvii.–xxi. Two additional stories of the times of the Judges. xvii., xviii. Micah's idols; the migration of the Danites and foundation of the sanctuary of Dan. xix.–xxi. The outrage committed by the inhabitants of Gibeah upon the Levite's concubine. The vengeance of the Israelites, ending in the almost complete extermination of the tribe of Benjamin. (*Prof. G. F. Moore.*)

THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR.

JUDGES.

CHAPTER I.

VERS. 1–10. **The children of Israel asked the Lord.**—*Simplicity in prayer*:—Just that! How we have modernised and complicated and destroyed prayer! "The children of Israel asked the Lord." How simple, how direct, how sensible, how likely to succeed! The altar may have lost its power: no atheist has pulled down the altar, no outsider has taken away one stone from the holy pile; the suppliants may have torn down their own altar. We will modernise and invent and enlarge and embroider the simplicity that would have saved us. "The children of Israel asked the Lord," whispered to Him, hailed Him, arrested His condescending attention by some sign of necessity. They whispered to the Lord, they told Him plainly the condition in which they were placed, and brought the whole need under His attention; they wanted leadership and captaincy and guidance, and they said, "Who shall do this?" The method has not been changed; Jesus Christ added nothing to this old method. Said He, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask." We have changed all that; we now are in danger of approaching the Lord as if He were an infinite Shah, and must needs be approached with long words and logical sequence. Speaking to God elevates the mind; prayer, however brief and however tremulous, takes the suppliant up to a higher level than he has ever scaled before. The whole idea of religion is intellectually elevating; no man can be truly religious and meanly little; to touch the Divine garment even at its edge is to rise to a new stature and to breathe a new air. I repeat, therefore, that asking God, talking to God, communing with God, elevates the mind. It is the spiritual exercise that elevates the soul; the words themselves may be poor, they may be ungrammatical, they may be uttered in a very halting and stumbling tone, but the exercise, spiritually understood, rightly interpreted, lifts the soul world on world a thousand worlds higher than can ever be occupied by a mere denizen of this world of dust. We cannot look God in the face without catching something of the brightness of His smile. Do they take knowledge of us that we have been with the literature of the day, with the journals of the morning, with the gossip of the time? or do they take knowledge of us that we have just come from the altar, that we have just seen the King, that we have not a moment ago been closeted with Christ, having shut the door, and do we come out of the presence-chamber new born, newly ordained, just crowned with the approbation of the Divine love? Talking to God, asking God, laying the whole case before God, sometimes laying it before Him without words, sometimes simply looking into His face, sometimes letting our throbbing, aching misery look into the infinite peace of the Divine tranquillity, will lift a man to a new status and clothe him with a new influence and enrich him with an abiding benediction. Let your misery seek the face of the King. Do not keep anything from God; you know perfectly well that you cannot keep anything from His omniscience; that is not the meaning of the exhortation; the meaning rather is, tell God everything as if He had never heard it; go and tell Jesus. Do not ask the man who never prayed to tell you what he thinks of prayer. People are

tempted to make a great mistake in that matter. They are going to hear an agnostic lecture on the subject of prayer! A prayerless man cannot lecture on that theme. Sooner ask a dead man to tell you his candid opinion of Beethoven than ask a prayerless man to tell you what he thinks of prayer. Ask the man who never was an inch from his own fireside what he thinks of the climate of the North Pole or the South. Consult saintly souls about the value of prayer. "The children of Israel asked the Lord." They did not dictate to Him. Prayer is not dictation; prayer is not always even suggestion, and when prayer is suggestion it is offered with halting breath and with a most reverent faith, lest a suggestion should be not only a sophism but an expression of selfishness. Ask God about everything; you undervalue life if you think there is anything beneath His attention; the very smallest thing that concerns you concerns Him; He has told us so in many a beauteous parable. Saith He, "A sparrow cannot fall to the ground without My notice." Observe, the people in question were "the children of Israel." Character is implied; character is not only implied, it is recognised and held up as a lesson. They belong to a praying host, to a covenanted ancestry, they were involved in the baptism of an oath. Do not imagine that a man can leap out of atheism and begin to pray for some selfish purpose, and have his answer on the spot. Character determines prayer; the simple heart suggests the right petition; the sincere spirit, praying at the Cross and in the name of Christ, can alone pray with lasting and ennobling effect. In this respect there is something in heredity, there is something in the covenant, something in the eternal decree. We stand the last members up to this moment of a great ancestry of prayer. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) **Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them?**—*Dead leaders and living duties*:—I. A GREAT LEADER DEAD, AND LIFE'S DUTIES AS PRESSING AS EVER. 1. Let who will and what will pass away, our own work only passes with our own life. 2. The advancement of God's purpose is dependent on no life in particular. 3. Great lives are sometimes removed that other lives may better feel their responsibility and cultivate their strength. II. HUMAN DIRECTION SUDDENLY FAILING, AND DIVINE GUIDANCE SPECIALLY SOUGHT. 1. Prayer prompted by the removal of long familiar light. 2. Prayer over unfulfilled commandments. 3. Prayer provoked by gathering dangers. 4. Prayer for God's appointment of our post in life. 5. The realism of prayer to every true-hearted suppliant. III. AN EMINENTLY FAITHFUL PAST DEMANDING A NO LESS VIGOROUS FUTURE. Judah had already done well. He who has done well in the past is under perpetual obligation to do no less well in the future. God also chooses those for new duties who have best served in the past. IV. GOD SPECIALLY CHOOSING SOME OF HIS SERVANTS, BUT LEAVING THEM LIBERTY TO SEEK THE HELP OF OTHERS. 1. The benefits of co-operation. What one cannot do, two can. What one can only do with difficulty, two can do easily. 2. The limits of co-operation. Judah might only seek aid from his own brethren, not from idolaters. V. THE LORD'S CALL TO GREAT DUTIES FOLLOWED BY HIS RICH BLESSING ON THOSE WHO SEEK FAITHFULLY TO PERFORM THEM. "The Lord delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand." 1. God calls and sends none of His servants in vain. 2. God's blessing answers to His own promise of blessing. 3. God's blessing satisfies His people's highest hopes. (*F. G. Marchant.*) *Dead heroes missed*:—1. In that this people was now constrained to look about them, and (now Joshua was dead) to do that themselves for their peace and quiet which he was wont to do for them, we are taught that when special persons are taken away then they who were left behind must put forth themselves and take the more pain than before. The which being so, men should make this use of such changes to provide and learn to want their good helps and friends beforehand. They should also acknowledge daily with hearty thanks to God what a benefit they have of them, while they enjoy them, and do all good that they may by the help of them. Which they cannot do, but they must of necessity feel the loss of them to be very great, and see that they must now lay their shoulders to the burden. For the which purpose this I add—oh, how sweetly and to their good liking have many lived when they had others to bear their burdens for them—as husbands, wives, subjects, children, neighbours: there is no doubt but that (which is the chiefest of all) they have therewith, that God is their friend also. But seeing many depend only on them in a carnal manner, and on their living still with them, and rest not on God, therefore their props fail them, and their desolation cometh upon them as the enemy upon an unarmed man. 2. We are taught here by their example, who sought to God in their doubts for counsel and resolution, that in all our doubtful

cases, partly touching our estate towards God, and partly particular duties and actions of our special callings and conditions of life, while we remain here on earth we should consult with and ask counsel of God for our resolution, in such manner as He hath taught us, and in no wise to conceal and bury our wants and defects that trouble us, or pass by the sins that cleave to us, or other difficulties in our dealings and business that oppress us, for so we provide ill for ourselves, even to live in ignorance and sorrow (with other inconveniences annexed thereunto) for ever after. (*R. Rogers.*) **And the Lord said, Judah shall go up.**—*God sovereign over His servants* :—May we not pause here to allow this oracular response to sink into the heart? How full it is in its manifold meaning! It asserts the sovereignty of God in disposing and ordering the work which His servants have to perform. It reminds us that every one is not to attempt everything; for Judah is to fight the enemy and the other tribes are to remain at home. It promises victory, not to every ardent soldier who might volunteer to take the field, but to the tribe whom the Lord shall order to the battle. It disturbs all rule-of-three calculations of success in proportion to the number of agents men may induce to go to work; success is for those whom the Lord shall send. It allows of no objection, no plea of incompetency, no deceitful humility, on the part of the called soldier: "Judah shall go up"; it is the word of a King. It hides pride from man, by declaring that although Judah would conquer, it would be only through Divine ordination and help. (*L. H. Wiseman, M.A.*) **Adoni-bezek.**—*The punishment of Adoni-bezek* :—I. THE INSTABILITY AND UNCERTAINTY OF WORLDLY GREATNESS. Look at this man—and behold in what slippery places God sets the mighty and noble. From the eagerness with which mankind pursue the distinctions of life, we should conclude, not only that they were very valuable in themselves, but that no kind of precariousness attached to them. But let not the strong be secure; let not the honourable be vain; let not the rich be high-minded. What is all history but a narrative of the reverses to which all earthly things are liable, however firmly established they once appeared to be; of the revolutions of empires; the destruction of cities; of the mighty put down from their seats; of counsellors led away spoiled, or politicians disgraced, generals banished, and monarchs put to death! II. JUDGMENT OVERTAKING THE SINNER IN THIS LIFE. Nor does Adoni-bezek stand alone as an instance of the present punishment of sin. Adam and Eve driven out of paradise; flood; cities of the plain; Lot's wife; Gehazi; Ananias and Sapphira, &c. This, however, is not always the case. The misery of the sinner is principally reserved for a future world, and we are now in a state of probation. But God would confirm our faith in His adorable providence. If all sin was punished here, we should look no further; if no sin, we should not easily believe in the power, the holiness, the truth of God. We may add that the punishment of sin in this world is sometimes unavoidable. If nations are punished at all, they must be punished in time—for in eternity men exist only as individuals. Nearly the same may be said of a family. Yea, the present punishment of sin is in some measure natural. For how frequently do men's sufferings arise from the very sins they commit! Extravagance breeds ruin—indolence, poverty—intemperance, disease. III. PUNISHMENT INFLICTED AFTER LONG DELAY. Behold the career of this sinner! What a lengthened course of iniquity was here! "So long and so often had I done this, that I thought God had not seen, or did not remember. But He has found me out; and I live long enough to be a miserable instance of this awful truth—that however long punishment may be delayed, it will at last be inflicted—as I have done, so God hath requited me." IV. A CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN SIN AND SUFFERING: "What I have inflicted upon others, is now inflicted upon me; and in my very punishment I read my crime—as I have done, so God hath requited me." 1. Between sin and punishment there is sometimes a comparative conformity. This is the case when we suffer things which have some resemblance to our crimes. 2. Sometimes there is also between them a direct conformity. This is the case when we suffer in the same way and in the same things in which we sin. 3. But there is a future conformity still more dreadful (Gal. vi. 7). V. THE HAND OF GOD ACKNOWLEDGED, WHILE MEN ARE ONLY EMPLOYED: "God hath requited me." But who saw anything of Him? A good man perceives the hand of God in all events, and he wishes to see it. But it is otherwise with the sinner. His apprehension of God is forced upon him; he would gladly get rid of the conviction: it is all terror and dismay to him—for he knows that God is his adversary, and He may now be coming to lay hold of him; he knows that he has a long account to give, and this may be the time of reckoning. Hence the bitterness of affliction: it is regarded

not only as a trial, but as a punishment. Lessons: 1. Abhor cruelty. It is equally disgraceful to religion and humanity. It renders you unpitied of God and man. 2. Improve the case of examples. If they were not particularly adapted to do us good, the Word of God would not be so full of them. Lodge them in your memory. Often reflect upon them. And make use of the dreadful as well as the pleasing. It is necessary that we should be awakened to flee from the wrath to come. (*W. Jay.*) *The story of requital*:—I. THE LIFE OF MAN CANNOT ESCAPE THE JUDGMENT OF GOD: "Be not deceived, God is not mocked," &c. Man may deny it, may theoretically disregard it, but cannot escape it! At the heart of things is the spirit of judgment. Human life appears to be confused, but before the Almighty it has shape, and plan, and purpose. II. LET NO MAN TAKE THE LAW INTO HIS OWN HANDS: "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, saith the Lord." Why have we suffered loss in business? May it not be that we have oppressed the poor and needy? Why are our schemes delayed and thwarted? Probably because we have been obstinate and unfriendly towards the schemes of others. Why are we held in disesteem or neglect? Probably because of the contempt in which we have held our brethren. So we are to look at the moral working of things, and to see in the results which are forced upon us, not the petty anger of men, but the holy and righteous judgment of God. III. EVERY GOOD DEED WILL BE HONOURED WITH APPROPRIATE REWARD. 1. Good deeds are their own reward. 2. Deeds done merely for the sake of reward cannot be good. IV. THOUGH JUSTICE BE LONG DELAYED, YET IT WILL BE VINDICATED EVENTUALLY. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Adoni-bezek; or, righteous retribution*:—In the accompaniments of war, not only have the most terrible injuries been inflicted during the battles, but when over the persons of the conquered have sometimes been subjected to worse torments than any they could have endured on the field. These doings have often been defended on the ground that they were necessary to self-defence and self-preservation. Alas! they are sometimes only to be explained by the depraved desire in the human heart of exercising arbitrary and cruel power. The practice referred to in this chapter—that of excision of the thumbs of captives—comes under this class. Probably it was to brand men as cowards that Adoni-bezek carried on such a cruel practice. He had evidently delighted in practising as much cruelty as possible. If he had thus treated seventy-two kings, it is probable that he had maltreated, or caused to be tormented, many others of inferior rank. The victorious Israelites advance, and Adoni-bezek has to fight a battle in which, instead of being the victor, he is the captive. He was taken and led, a prisoner, into the presence of another. Never had he anticipated this; much less that he would have to suffer as others had done through him. With hands and feet writhing from the recent excision, he makes this acknowledgment: "As I have done, so God hath requited me." 1. Adoni-bezek notices the remarkable correspondence between previous barbarity and present suffering. He takes it in the sense of retribution. 2. The evil which falls upon us may ofttimes be the consequence of the wrong-doing of others. Sometimes various circumstances connected with bringing the offender to justice are so remarkable, and seemingly so responsive to crime, that there arises in the minds of others the belief that it is a special and divinely-imposed retribution. 3. The recognition of the correspondence between past acts and his present misfortune leads Adoni-bezek to ascribe it to a Divine hand: "God has requited me." He was not an Israelite, had probably been an idolator, and may have trusted in false gods for a long time. He had heard of God, and what He had done to other nations; now he finds himself conquered, and is led to attribute his personal sufferings to the God of the Israelites. God has so arranged natural law that it works in harmony with eternal justice. There is a subtle connection between our acts and our sufferings. We may see illustrations of this every day. A man may act in a certain loose and careless way and prepare for himself consequences the most terrible and unlooked-for. Another gives way to fierce, ungoverned passions, and makes himself, thereby, wretched. Another chooses to spend his time only in the pursuits of pleasure, and to squander his money on every foolish thing that pleases his eye; he soon finds himself without the power to enjoy, and without money to procure such enjoyment. Another gives way to pilfering, and soon finds himself discharged, characterless. Even if he is not punished by law, he is dishonoured. Or a youth may have kind parents, and every opportunity of making his way in the world, but he gives way to dissipated habits, and finally, when character is gone and friends are dead, is glad to earn the most trifling sum under men whom he once despised A just retribution in all such cases certainly follows

the sin. Like Adoni-bezek, such must confess that God "hath requited" the wrong-doing. 4. This acknowledgment concerning the just requital of sin is sure to take place in the other world, if not in this. Pagan mythology taught that the mean and sly will, in the other world, take the lynx form; the slanderers, that of the vampire fanning ever to sleep, and sucking the life-blood at the same time; that the hypocritical will be as crocodiles, crawling in mud and shedding false tears; and that the narrow and bigoted, fearful of truth and loving error, may be as owls, hooting amid darkness and ruin, in the forsaken and desolate regions of the other world. May not the dishonest man there have to cringe and hide himself still more? May not the drunken man have a constant craving, a burning thirst, a racking brain? May not the ambitious man have a constant anxiety to obtain power, and the torment of always being supplanted, or effectually checked, by others? May not the avaricious man be in a constant fever of suspicion? May not the ill-tempered man be in a constant whirl of passion, and make himself more and more wretched? May not the ruthless and cruel fear the scorn of their victims and clutches of their enemies? May not the voluptuary have to bear the torment of an inflamed heart and ungratified lusts? (*Fred. Hastings.*) *A thrilling life and its lessons*:—I. THE LIFE. Brief biography. Throned. Successful in war. Cruel. At last a defeated tyrant. Three scenes. 1. Celebrating his victories. 2. Feeding royal captives. 3. The defeated tyrant's unsuccessful flight. II. THE LESSONS. Note three—1. To what depths of cruelty it is possible for some to sink themselves. How came Adoni to be such a tyrant? (1) Possibly, in part, through parental neglect. (2) Through neglect of self-discipline. 2. Honoured men sometimes fall from palace to prison. 3. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." (*Homiletic Review.*) *Punishment delayed*:—God often forbears and defers His punishments. "As I did long ago," saith Adoni-bezek, "yea again and again, seventy times one after another—so long and so often that I thought God had either not seen or quite forgotten me; yet now I see He requiteth me." How true this observation is, is sufficiently witnessed by their experience who have little less than stumbled hereat. This made Cato, a heathen man, to cry out: "The disposals of Divine providence are not a little cloudy and dark." This made David, a man after God's own heart, to confess and say: "My feet were almost gone, my steps had well-nigh slipped." This made Jeremiah cry out from the bottom of an amazed soul: "Righteous art Thou, O Lord, when I plead with Thee; yet let me talk with Thee of Thy judgments. Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? Why are they happy that deal very treacherously?" Yea, those martyred saints (Rev. vi. 10) are heard to cry from under the altar, "How long?" &c. Now as these forenamed have stumbled at God's delaying His judgments, so others there are who have been quite deceived, verily believing that with God what was forborne was also forgotten. Such an one was Adoni-bezek here, who, having escaped so long, thought to have escaped ever. And such were those whereof David spake (Psa. x. 6). Such an one is the great whore of Babylon, that sings: "I sit like a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow." Such an one was Pherecydes Syrius, master of Pythagoras, and a famous philosopher, and one that is said to have been the first philosopher that taught among the Greeks the soul to be immortal; and yet among all his knowledge had not learned this one principle: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." For, as Ælian reports, he used among his scholars to vaunt of his irreligion after this manner, saying that he had never offered sacrifice to any god in all his life, and yet had lived as long and as merrily as those who had offered several hecatombs. But he that thus impiously abused the long-suffering of God came at length to an end as strange as his impiety was unusual; for so they report of him that he was stricken, like Herod by the angel of the Lord, with such a disease that serpents bred of the corrupt humours of his body, which ate and consumed him being yet alive. But that we may neither distrust the righteous ways of God, nor prevent His unsearchable counsels with our over-hasty expectation, let us a little consider of the ends why God oftentimes defers and prolongs His judgments. 1. For the sake of godly ones, for whom God useth to forbear even multitudes of sinners. So had there been but ten righteous persons in Sodom, Sodom had never been destroyed: "I will not destroy it for ten's sake." So for good Josiah's sake God deferred the plagues He had decreed to bring upon that people (2 Kings xxii. 20). 2. To give time of repentance and amendment (2 Pet. iii. 9). This is shown by the parable of the fig-tree (Luke xiii. 7). A hundred

and twenty years the old world had given them before the flood came. 3. The opportunity of example by them unto others and of manifesting His own glory. God is Lord of times; and as He created them, so He alone knows a fit time for all things under the sun. He, therefore, who knows all occasions, when He seeth a fit time for His judgments to profit other men by example, and most of all to set forth His own glory, then He sends them forth and till then He will defer them. 4. When God, intending some extraordinary judgment, suffers men's sins to grow unto a full ripeness that their sin may be as conspicuous unto the world as His purpose in their punishment shall be. Thus God punished not the Canaanites in Abraham's time, but deferred it till Israel's coming out of Egypt; and that, as Himself witnesseth (Gen. xv. 16): "Because the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full." And therefore is not this last end to be looked for in all God's delays; but it seemeth proper to His extraordinary punishments—when God meaneth, as it were, to get Himself a name amongst men, then God stays to have the sin full, upon which He will pour a full vial of wrath and indignation. (*Joseph Mede, B.D.*)

Adoni-bezek's confession:—I. THE SUFFERING OF PUNISHMENT EXTORTS THE CONFESSION OF SIN. The reason whereof is the very nature of punishment, which always implieth some offence, and therefore is a good remembrancer of the same. Thus Joseph's brethren, when they were distressed in Egypt, cried, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother." Proud Pharaoh, when he saw the plague of hail and thunder, said: "I have now sinned; the Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked." The proud stomachs of the Israelites came down when once the fiery serpents stung them, and then they came to Moses and said: "We have sinned; for we have spoken against the Lord and against thee." Manasseh, whom all the threatenings of God's prophets in fifty years' space could never move, yet when he was bound in fetters and carried prisoner unto Babylon, "then he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers." Whosoever, therefore, he be that feels not this fruit and makes not this use of his afflictions is worse than hard-hearted Pharaoh, worse than cruel Adoni-bezek. But if by this means we come to see and acknowledge our sin, then may we say with David: "It is good for me that I was afflicted," and give praise unto our God, who is able out of such hard rocks as these to make flow the saving waters of repentance. II. GOD'S JUDGMENT FOR SIN IS ONE OF THE STRONGEST MOTIVES TO MAKE AN ATHEIST CONFESS THERE IS A GOD. Those who say, "There is no God," David accounteth them in the number of fools (Psa. liii. 1). Solomon styleth punishment the schoolmaster of fools. If for all fools, then also for atheistical fools, that they, either by their own or by example of God's plagues upon others, may be taught to put away their folly. Most certain it is, the not observing of God's judgments, or the supposed examples of some who seem to escape the hand of God in the greatest sins, is a main occasion of atheism. For this cause, therefore, David, as jealous of God's honour and knowing what force God's judgments have to keep atheism from creeping into the hearts of men, desireth God (Psa. lix. 13). Hence it is also that God often in Ezekiel doth plainly affirm this to be the end of His judgments, that it might be known that He was the Lord. As in Ezek. vi. 6 thus He threatens Israel: "Your cities shall be laid waste, and your high places shall be desolate," &c. Ver. 7: "And the slain shall fall in the midst of you; and you shall know that I am the Lord." And again, vers. 12, 13: "He that is far off shall die by the pestilence; and he that is near shall fall by the sword. Then shall ye know that I am the Lord." And Ezek. xxv. 17, concerning the Philistines: "I will execute great vengeance upon them, saith the Lord, with furious rebukes; and they shall know that I am the Lord when I shall lay My vengeance upon them." If this, then, be so as ye have heard, let us learn hence a good preservative against atheism and all the ill motions of the devil and our flesh drawing thereunto; not lightly, as most men do, to pass over the judgments of God upon sin, but duly and diligently to observe them; if in ourselves, then more severely; if in our neighbours, curiously but charitably. III. AS PUNISHMENT IN GENERAL BRINGETH SIN TO MIND WHICH ELSE WOULD BE FORGOTTEN, SO THE FASHION AND KIND THEREOF WELL CONSIDERED MAY LEAD US, AS IT WERE BY THE HAND, TO KNOW THE VERY SIN WE ARE PUNISHED FOR. God's visible judgments have usually in them a stamp of conformity with the sin for which they are inflicted; for either we suffer the same thing ourselves that we have done to others or something resembling or like unto it, or else are punished about the same thing wherein our sin was, or, lastly, in the place or time where and when we sinned. I am persuaded there is no judgment which God sends for any special sin but it hath one of these marks in it. Come,

therefore, to Adoni-bezek, and let us learn of him by God's stamp in our punishment to find out what sin He aims at. If we would once use to read this handwriting of God in our afflictions, what a motive would it be to make us leave many a sin wherein the devil nuzzles us the greater part of our life without sense and feeling? For if anything would scare us from sin, sure this would, to hear word from God Himself what the sin is He plagues us for and so sharply warns us to amend. Whensoever, therefore, any cross or calamity befalls us or any of ours, either in body, goods, or name, or in the success of anything we take in hand, let us not rebel against God with an impatient heart, or fret at the occasion or author of our misery; but let us take a just account of our life past, and thus reason with ourselves: "This is surely none other but the very finger of God; I am punished, therefore have I sinned. I am punished thus and thus, in this or that sort, in this or that thing, in this or that place or time; therefore God is angry with me for something I have done, the same with that I suffer, or something like unto it, or because I sinned in this thing, or at this time, or in this place, when and where I am now punished. 'As I have done, so surely God hath requited me.' Therefore I will not look any longer upon any other cause or occasion of this misery, of this cross or calamity, but look unto my sin and give glory unto God who sent the hand which hath done all this unto me." (*Ibid.*) *The law of retribution:*—"The fox finds himself at last at the furrier's," and his fate is all the more certain because of the foxy conduct in which he has been engaged. They say "A bad deed never dies"; and they might further say that its life is quickened and its sting intensified by the cumulative influence of time. "He can't reap wheat that sows hemlock"; the harvest must be to the full as poisonous as the seed. As we brew, we must drink; so we cannot be too prudent as to the purity of the materials or too careful of the mixing. "Do well, and have well; do ill, and look for the like." "Remember the reckoning" is a pregnant old saw that might well be suspended in home and office, hearthstone and wayside; it would often save men a tremendous balance on the contra side of the ledgers both of money and morals. Sin and punishment are like the body and the shadow, never very far apart. Who sin for their profit will not profit by their sin; you may see nothing but well in its commission, you will see nothing but woe in its conclusion. The law of retribution is as fixed as the law of gravitation. There is a connecting string between ourselves and our misdeeds. We tie ourselves by an invisible and enduring thread to every evil deed we do. There is an Australian missile called the boomerang, which is thrown so as to describe singular curves, and falls again at the feet of the thrower. Sin is that boomerang, which goes off into space, but turns again upon its author, and, with tenfold force, strikes him who launched it. (*J. Jackson Wray.*) *The retribution of God acknowledged:*—In saying, "God hath requited me," it is to be noted that he, an heathen idolater, could see so far as to ascribe to God his affliction. Whereby we may see that very bad men do acknowledge God to be the striker and punisher of them. But where should he learn it? for though it did him no good to acknowledge it, yet it is that which many who have been baptized do not come to, but curse and ban, rage and fret, in their afflictions, crying out of their ill-fortune, as they call it, so far are they from resting in the justice of God, and to say, "He hath done righteously." Also as they ascribe to chance and fortune their calamities, so do they run for help to witches and sorcerers when they be oppressed with them, which is greatly to the convicting of them. (*R. Rogers.*) *Retribution inevitable:*—Gravitation is not more unerring than retribution. Sin and punishment have been said by Emerson to "grow out of one stem." Sin is like the flower that appears first; but punishment is the fruit lurking and swelling within, and destined to appear when the flower is blown. (*G. A. Sowter, M.A.*)

Ver. 11. Kirjath-sepher.—*The Book-Town:*—The name Kirjath-sepher, that is Book-Town, has been supposed to point to the existence of a semi-popular literature among the pre-Judæan inhabitants of Canaan. We cannot build with any certainty upon a name, but there are other facts of some significance. Already the Phœnicians, the merchants of the age, some of whom no doubt visited Kirjath-sepher on their way to Arabia or settled in it, had in their dealings with Egypt begun to use that alphabet to which most languages, from Hebrew and Aramaic on through Greek and Latin to our own, are indebted for the idea and shapes of letters. And it is not improbable that an old-world Phœnician library of skins, palm-leaves or inscribed tablets had given distinction to this town lying away

towards the desert from Hebron. Written words were held in half-superstitious veneration, and a very few records would greatly impress a district peopled chiefly by wandering tribes. Nothing is insignificant in the pages of the Bible, nothing is to be disregarded that throws the least light upon human affairs and Divine providence; and here we have a suggestion of no slight importance. Doubt has been cast on the existence of a written language among the Hebrews till centuries after the Exodus. It has been denied that the law could have been written out by Moses. This difficulty is now seen to be imaginary, like many others that have been raised. It is certain that the Phœnicians trading in Egypt in the time of the Hyksos kings had settlements quite contiguous to Goshen. What more likely than that the Hebrews, who spoke a language akin to the Phœnicians, should have shared the discovery of letters almost from the first, and practised the art of writing in the days of their favour with the monarchs of the Nile valley? The oppression of the following period might prevent the spread of letters among the people; but a man like Moses must have seen their value and made himself familiar with their use. The importance of this indication in the study of Hebrew law and faith is very plain. Nor should we fail to notice the interesting connection between the Divine lawgiving of Moses and the practical invention of a worldly race. There is no exclusiveness in the providence of God. The art of a people, acute and eager indeed, but without spirituality, is not rejected as profane by the inspired leader of Israel. Egyptians and Phœnicians have their share in originating that culture which mingles its stream with sacred revelation and religion. Letters and religion, culture and faith, must needs go hand in hand. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*)

Vers. 12–15. **To him will I give Achsah my daughter.**—*Difficulties and hardships in life:*—There was more difficulty and danger in the winning of this city than others; which teaches us that we must not think it strange if some part of our life be more encumbered than other parts and times. The husbandman is hindered sometimes by the rainy weather: but yet so, as he hath his seasons free from it, to do his business in. The artificer is troubled about putting away his wares, and the falling of the price, so that he cannot always make his advantage of them, as ordinarily he doth, for the maintaining of himself and his charge. But God changeth those times so that they do not always keep at one stay. In more particular manner I might show the disappointments that all sorts of people meet with and have. And why do I set down all this about the matter in hand? but that we may see the wisdom and mercy of God herein, who mixeth both together, because if all our life should be smoothly carried, and easily passed, we should be made thereby unfit for our change, especially for great trials, when they come; and so likewise, if it should be for the most part tedious and troublesome, there should be nothing but weariness and discomfort. And therefore all sorts should seek to be in God's favour, that so they may also be under His government in both estates. (*R. Rogers.*) **Thou hast given me a south land; give me also springs of water.**—*The blessings given in the gospel:*—To Achsah Caleb gave a south land—a plot of land with a southern aspect. It did not face the dark and chilly north; but the midday sun beat full upon it. But still she has a request to make: the blessing given her is not enough. The text reminds us of the blessing God has given us in the gospel. "A south land." What splendour of light—what a clear revelation of His mind and will! Never has anything been seen on earth to rival it! Think of this! The splendour of gospel light—the clear discovery of the way of our salvation—the vision of a perfect harmony between all God's attributes, no less than between the creature's highest good and the Creator's highest glory! Ours is a "south land." The light does not come to us refracted through an atmosphere of types and shadows; but falls full, so that our eyes are dazzled and filled with tears; for it is "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God" seen "in the face of Jesus Christ." What fervour of love! There is light in the wintry meteor that blazes across the northern sky, but there is no warmth in it—nothing to stir the dulness of sleeping germs or folded buds, to bring the blade through the soil or the blossom on the tree. But sun-rays have heat as well as light in them—they have a quickening as well as an illuminating power. And so the gospel is as fervent as it is splendid—it brings near to us a God of light and love. Such is the blessing already given to all who are faithfully taught the glorious gospel. The text tells us of another blessing yet to be implored. See the case of Achsah. The mere possession of south land was not enough for her; the light and heat of the noonday sun were not enough. Her heritage needed another kind of influence to

make it fruitful—that influence that comes with springs of water. Without this the sun might shine and glow in vain—nay, worse than in vain: it might soon become a curse rather than a blessing. When "the heavens are as brass, and the earth is as iron," that land fares badly that faces the southern sun, and is without springs of water. How naturally, then, might Achsah put up the prayer, "Thou hast given me a south land; give me also springs of water." See our case. Oh, it is very terrible to think of, but plainly declared—that the great blessing of the gospel may become a curse! If it is not "a savour of life unto life," it will prove "a savour of death unto death." If it does not make us fruitful to man's good and God's glory, it will only harden us, wither us, consume us. O dwellers in the south land, awake! Awake, and cry aloud for "springs of water." See the work of the Holy Spirit. That work is very frequently referred to in Holy Scripture under the figure of rain from heaven: rain, sometimes filling the wells and water-courses, and sometimes feeding the secret springs. Observe—there is no antagonism between the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit, any more than between sun and rain. The one is the supplement to the other; both co-operate harmoniously together to one blessed end. (*F. Tucker, B.A.*) *Achsah's asking a pattern of prayer*:—I. HER CONSIDERATION OF THE MATTER BEFORE SHE WENT TO HER FATHER. 1. She naturally wished that her husband should find in that estate all that was convenient and all that might be profitable; and looking it all over, she saw what was wanted. Before you pray, know what you are needing. "Oh!" says somebody, "I utter some good words." Does God want your words? Think what you are going to ask before you begin to pray, and then pray like business men. 2. This woman, before she went to her father with her petition, asked her husband's help. When she came to her husband "she moved him to ask of her father a field." It is often a great help in prayer for two of you to agree touching the thing that concerns Christ's kingdom. A cordon of praying souls around the throne of grace will be sure to prevail. 3. Achsah bethought herself of this one thing, that she was going to present her request to her father. I suppose that she would not have gone to ask of anybody else; but she said to herself, "Come, Achsah, Caleb is your father. The boon I am going to ask is not of a stranger, who does not know me, but of a father, in whose care I have been ever since I was born." This thought ought to help us in prayer, and it will help us when we remember that we do not go to ask of an enemy, nor to plead with a stranger; but we say, "Our Father, which art in heaven." 4. She went humbly, yet eagerly. If others will not pray with you, go alone; and when you go, go very reverently. Thou art on earth, and God is in heaven; multiply not thy words as though thou wert talking to thine equal. II. HER ENCOURAGEMENT. "Caleb said unto her, what wilt thou?" 1. You should know what you want. Could some Christians, if God were to say to them, "What wilt thou?" answer Him? Do you not think that we get into such an indistinct, indiscriminate kind of a way of praying that we do not quite know what we do really want? If it is so with you, do not expect to be heard till you know what you want. 2. Ask for it. God's way of giving is through our asking. I suppose that He does that in order that He may give twice over, for a prayer is itself a blessing as well as the answer to prayer. Perhaps it sometimes does us as much good to pray for a blessing as to get the blessing. III. THE PRAYER ITSELF. 1. A good beginning: "Give me a blessing." Why, if the Lord shall hear that prayer from everybody in this place, what a blessed company we shall be; and we shall go our way to be a blessing to this City of London beyond what we have ever been before! 2. Notice next, how she mingled gratitude with her petition: "Give me a blessing: for thou hast given me a south land." Go back in grateful praise to God for what He has done for thee in days gone by, and then get a spring for thy leap for a future blessing or a present blessing. Mingle gratitude with all thy prayers. 3. There was not only gratitude in this woman's prayer, but she used former gifts as a plea for more: "Thou hast given me a south land; give me also," &c. Oh, yes, that is a grand argument with God: "Thou hast given me; therefore give me some more." Every blessing given contains the eggs of other blessing within it. Thou must take the blessing, and find the hidden eggs, and let them be hatched by thine earnestness, and there shall be a whole brood of blessings springing out of a single blessing. See thou to that. 4. But this woman used this plea in a particular way: she said, "Thou hast given me a south land; give me also springs of water." When you ask of God, ask distinctly: "Give me springs of water." You may say, "Give me my daily bread." You

may cry, "Give me a sense of pardoned sin." You may distinctly ask for anything which God has promised to give. IV. HER SUCCESS. 1. Her father gave her what she asked. And God gives us what we ask for when it is wise to do so. But sometimes we make mistakes. 2. He gave her in large measure. The Lord "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." Some use that passage in prayer, and misquote it, "above what we can ask or even think." That is not in the Bible, because you can ask or even think anything you like; but it is "above all that we ask or think." Our asking or our thinking falls short; but God's giving never does. 3. He gave her this without a word of upbraiding. Now, may the Lord grant unto us to ask of Him in wisdom, and may He not have to upbraid us, but give us all manner of blessings both of the upper and the nether springs, both of heaven and earth, both of eternity and time, and give them freely, and not say even a single word by way of upbraiding us! (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

The upper springs and the nether springs:—What is told us about Caleb's daughter is an illustration of the life of the soul. 1. Every earnest Christian, realising the seriousness of life, the meaning of his profession, the destiny which is before him, ought to ask of God a field; that is, a vocation. God individualises His servants. He has endowed each one in His own wise way, and He expects each one to exercise His own particular endowment for the glory of the Master and Lord. At the same time it is also true that He allows us a great deal of liberty in adapting our vocations to our lives, or perhaps one should rather say, adapting our lives to our vocations. One who believes himself called to the ministry may not take up any other profession, yet may without sin choose whether he will devote himself to mission work or minister as opportunity may present itself in parish life. In like manner the less marked commonplace vocations of everyday Christian life are largely shaped by the earnest disciple himself following the bent of his own enthusiasm, though it must be always in deference to the will of God, when that is in any way specially manifested. Even in cases where there seems to be no possibility of individual choosing, where one's way seems marked out by circumstances, and there is nothing to do but to go on in it, there should still be conscious recognition of the opportunity of a willingly accepted vocation; there should be the asking for a field on the part of the loyal soul; that is, the asking for grace to do a true and useful work for God in the circumstances He has prepared for us. 2. It does not take us long to discover that our fields are in the land of the south—arid, hard to cultivate, lacking moisture. All true vocations are hard and trying. The purpose of the existence of the kingdom of heaven upon earth is the conquest and overthrow of the kingdom of evil; that means that all who will serve in the Master's service have to fight. It often happens that, because vocations are found to be very hard, the disciple comes to the conclusion that what he thought to be his calling is not truly so, that he has made a mistake. 3. What then? The undaunted soul betakes itself to prayer. The vocation is hard, almost unendurable; never mind, light down from off the ass and pray for a blessing. There is here no thought of surrendering one's calling; of saying, "This is too hard a thing for me; take it away, and give me an easier lot in Thy service." Caleb's daughter did not ask her father to exchange the arid field for a fruitful and better situated one; she asked him to give her something besides it, however. God loves to have us develop our vocations by prayer. We must have especial and particular times of prayer set apart for that purpose, wherein we light down, as it were, from our daily duties and make our petitions to the Most High. 4. Did Caleb respond to his daughter's petition? Aye, surely, but no more surely than God responds to the prayers of His children who are striving to live loyally in the vocations He has assigned them. She asked for springs of water, for with springs of water to irrigate it the south land might be made most fertile and profitable for every sort of good fruit. It is said significantly that he gave to her both the upper springs and the nether springs. For the lower springs, that is the wells, supplement the waters of the upper springs. These last coming down abundantly in torrents from the mountains, guided by the hand of man through the fields, make them exceeding fertile, and then the superabundance of their waters is stored, according to nature's wise provision, in the lower wells, which do not dry up with the long-continued heat of the summer, but remain an ever reliable and constant supply. If God has given to His children hard and arid fields of labour, in which they are to find their several vocations, we are not to forget that to those who seek His help in prayer He grants abundantly the upper and the nether springs. 5. What, then, are these upper springs, the fresh, cooling waters from the hills, flowing down in

copious streams, for man's use and profit, that the dry ground may be refreshed by them, and made to blossom as the rose and to be fruitful with all manner of good things? Evidently these upper springs of God's gift are the waters of supernatural, sacramental grace; the waters that flow down from the delectable mountains, the heavenly provision in overflowing abundance for earthly spiritual drought. We were never meant to fulfil our vocations without the help of grace. We think so much of our own energy, gifts, work, money, as if these things earnestly and heartily applied were to make the arid south land of God's calling for us fertile. They are all very well, but do not anything more valuable than dig the irrigating trenches which shall carry the sparkling waters of the upper springs down through the dry land, and make it productive. 6. And the nether springs, the lower wells, what are they in the Christian life? They are those blessed reservoirs of the sacramental grace which has been drawn in and assimilated by the correspondence of earnest disciples, ready for use in the times when the upper springs do not seem to flow freely, and to make fertile the field of the soul's labour. They are living fountains of God-given water, staying us when the special help from on high seems for the time withdrawn. (1) There is the nether spring of love. As the wells in the lowlands are filled from the upper springs, so love of God, fed by sacramental grace, becomes a living fountain of perennial freshness in the soul. (2) The sacramental life teaches one patience; the graces which flow from Holy Communion fill up this deep fountain, so that it never runs dry. (3) There is yet another fine nether spring of precious value in the devout Christian life—the spring of confident expectation, the spring which combines faith and hope in one great wealth of unshaken trust. This too is filled by the upper springs of sacramental grace. One learns by his experience in confessing his sins how true and real is the pardon that comes through the precious blood. One learns, as the result of his communions, how mighty is the transforming power of the Christ-life so lovingly imparted to us. Thus he becomes sublimely sure, magnificently confident, with a sureness and a confidence that are not inconsistent with genuine humility. (*Arthur Ritchie.*)

Vers. 17–19. **Zephath . . . Hormah.**—*Zephath and Hormah:*—In the world of thought and feeling there are many Zephaths, whence quick onset is often made upon the faith and hope of men. We are pressing towards some end, mastering difficulties, contending with open and known enemies. Only a little way remains before us. But invisible among the intricacies of experience is this lurking foe who suddenly falls upon us. It is a settlement in the faith of God we seek. The onset is of doubts we had not imagined, doubts of inspiration, of immortality, of the incarnation, truths the most vital. We are repulsed, broken, disheartened. There remains a new wilderness journey till we reach by the way of Moab the fords of our Jordan and the land of our inheritance. Yet there is a way, sure and appointed. The baffled, wounded soul is never to despair. And when at length the settlement of faith is won, the Zephath of doubt may be assailed from the other side, assailed successfully and taken. The experience of some poor victims of what is oddly called philosophic doubt need dismay no one. For the resolute seeker after God there is always a victory, which in the end may prove so easy, so complete, as to amaze him. The captured Zephath is not destroyed nor abandoned, but is held as a fortress of faith. It becomes Hormah—the consecrated. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*) **Judah . . . could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley.**—*What hinders the gospel?*—Infinite Intelligence has a plan by which He does all things. He never works by impulse or caprice. 1. God frequently makes human agency the condition of His own action. 2. So entirely does the Almighty abide by this plan, that if the required human agency is not put forth, He will not work. These "chariots of iron" so discouraged and terrified the Israelites that they would not do the part which God designed them to do; and because God would not violate His own plan, He "could not" drive them out. God's plan is the best, and He cannot deviate from the best. Now, the plan by which He promotes the circulation of the gospel amongst men is most clearly revealed in the Bible; and it is this—a proper human representation of it. The Divine idea is to be reflected on man through man. Why the great Author of the gospel should proceed on such a plan is a question which, if proper, it is not necessary to determine. We may as well ask why He has left the life of the world, vegetable and animal, to depend upon the solar beams and the fertile showers. It is enough for me to know, as the reasons of His procedure in any case, that as His nature is love, the

ultimate reason of every act is some benevolent idea. Love is the planning genius of the universe: it frames and fashions all. Nor is it difficult to see love in the plan in question. What an honour does it confer on human nature to make it the reflector and exponent of Divine ideas! What benign power, too, is there in the arrangements to stimulate the devout to benevolent effort, and to unite the human family in the bonds of gratitude and compassion! Three general remarks may suffice to show that there has been sufficient mal-representation to account for its present limited influence. I. THAT THE GOSPEL REGARDS THE CEREMONIAL AS SUBORDINATE TO THE DOCTRINAL. Though the Old Testament had many rites, the New has only two—baptism and the Lord's Supper. But the rites of both the Old and the New were intended to answer the same functions in the economy of revelation, namely, to adumbrate doctrines. II. THAT THE GOSPEL REGARDS THE DOCTRINAL AS SUBSERVIENT TO THE ETHICAL. And if this is so, a mere theological manifestation is a mal-representation. Christianity consists mainly of two elements—doctrines and precepts: subjects for faith and rules for life—theology and morality. Doctrines and precepts are rays from the same eternal sun of truth; the former, however, throwing their radiance upwards—revealing the vast heavens that encircle us, and impressing us with ideas of infinitude; the latter flowing down upon our earthly path, and guiding our feet in the way of life. Of what use would the sun be to us if all its rays streamed upwards, unfolding the boundless blue, and none reached our earthly sphere, to show us how to act? The theology of the Bible is useless to a man unless it changes his heart and moulds his life anew. The doctrines of Christ are not learnt like the doctrines of Newton or Euclid, by mere intellectual study; they are learnt by the heart and the life. Action alone translates Christian doctrines into meaning. III. THAT THE GOSPEL REGARDS THE TRUE ETHICAL AS EMBODIED IN THE LIFE OF CHRIST. And if this is so, a mere dry legal manifestation of it is a mal-representation. Where are the ethical elements whose illustration, enforcement, and promotion, all doctrines are to subserve, to be found? Are they to be found in the statutes of governments, the rubrics of Churches, or the practices of religious sects? No! Men have often made sound doctrine subservient to the corrupt ethics drawn from such sources; but the ethics to which all sound theology should ever minister are embodied in the life of one Being—Christ. Our whole duty is summed up in His command, "Follow Me." Assimilation to Christ is the perfection of man. Another train of thought may further serve to illustrate the various forms of the mal-representation, and to sum up our observations upon this truly momentous theme. 1. The ceremonies of the gospel being only intended as the symbols of its doctrines, a mere ritualistic ministry of it is a mal-representation. 2. The doctrines of the gospel being coincident with human reason, any irrational manifestation of it is a mal-representation. 3. The meaning of the gospel being only truly reached by experience, a mere professional manifestation of it is a mal-representation. Christianity is only thoroughly understood by the heart. 4. The genius of the gospel being that of benevolence, any unloving manifestation of it is a mal-representation. Does the Church represent love? warm, self-denying, world-wide love? If not, it does not represent the gospel. 5. The provisions of the gospel being for universal man, any restricted offer of them is a mal-representation. Let the narrow-minded bigot preach that the sun was lit up for a class; or that the ocean was poured forth for a class; or that the sea of air, whose every wave is life, rolls through the world for a class; and his sermons will be as true to nature as those sermons are to the gospel, that proclaim that God's mercy is only for a "favourite few." My conclusion is, that the first thing to be done in order to convert the world is to reform the Church. You may have your missionary societies, you may send forth your emissaries, you may stud the globe with your missionary stations; but unless the Church will give the Christianity of Christ in His own spirit of love, it will be labour lost. (*Homilist.*) **Chariots of iron.**—*Chariots of iron*:—I. THE LORD'S POWER WAS TRUSTED AND MAGNIFIED: "The Lord was with Judah." 1. Great victories. 2. Numerous victories. 3. Brotherly action (ver. 3). 4. God gave great proofs of His presence and power by raising up, here and there, a man in their midst who performed heroic deeds. Caleb shall be gathered to his fathers, but Othniel shall follow him, who shall be as brave as he. 5. The reason why the men of Judah were successful was because they had full confidence in God. The Lord will not fall short of the measure: let us not make the measure short. II. THE LORD'S POWER RESTRAINED BECAUSE DISTRUSTED. The men of Judah could drive out the inhabitants of the mountain, but they could not drive out the

inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron. As far as their faith went, so far God kept touch with them, and they could do anything and everything; but when they despondingly thought that they could not drive out the inhabitants of the wide valleys, then they failed utterly. 1. They retained too much confidence in themselves. If their confidence had been in God alone, these chariots of iron would have been ciphers in the calculation. The bare arm of God is the source of all power. 2. They believed one promise of God and did not believe another. Beware of being pickers and choosers of God's promises. 3. There was a further reason for failure arising out of this imperfection of their faith: they could not conquer the chariots of iron, because, first, they did not try. The Hebrew does not say that they could not drive them out. What the Hebrew says is that they did not drive them out. Some things we cannot do because we never make the attempt. I wish we had among Christian workers the spirit of the Suffolk lad who was brought up in court to be examined by an overbearing lawyer. The lawyer roughly said to him, "Hodge, can you read Greek?" "I don't know, sir," said he. "Well, fetch a Greek book," said the lawyer, and showing the lad a passage he said to him, "Can you read that?" "No." "Then why did you not say that you could not?" "Because I never say I cannot do a thing till I have tried it." If that spirit were in Christian people we should achieve great things; but we set down such and such a thing as manifestly beyond our power, and, silently, we whisper to ourselves, "therefore beyond God's power," and so we let it alone. No chariots of iron will be driven out if we dare not make the attempt. 4. Next, I suspect that they did not drive them out because they were idle. If cavalry were to be dealt with, Judah must bestir himself. If chariots of iron were to be defeated they must enter upon an arduous campaign; and so, taking counsel of their fears and their idleness, they said, "Let us not venture on the conflict." There are many things that Christ's Church is unable to do because it is too lazy. 5. Then, again, they were not at all anxious to meet the men who manned those chariots, for they were afraid. These men of Judah were cowards in the presence of chariots of iron, and what can a coward do? He is great at running away. They say that he "may live to fight another day." Not he: he will live, but he will not live to fight, depend upon it, any more another day than he does to-day. 6. There was no excuse for this on the part of Judah, as there is really no excuse for us when we think any part of God's work to be too difficult for us—for, recollect, there was a special promise made about this very case holy (Deut. xx. 1). III. THE LORD'S POWER VINDICATED. I could tell you of women, sick and infirm, scarcely able to leave their beds, who are doing work which, to some strong Christians, seems too hard to attempt. Have I not seen old men doing for the Lord in their feebleness that which young men have declined? Could I not tell you of some with one talent who are bringing in a splendid revenue of glory to their Lord and Master, while you fine young fellows with ten talents have wrapped them all in a napkin and hid them in the earth? I wish that I could shame myself, and shame every worker here, into enterprises that would astonish unbelievers. God help us to do that which seems impossible. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Vers. 22–26. **The house of Joseph . . . went up against Bethel; and the Lord was with them.**—*Success in carrying out God's commands:*—This work of the house of Joseph which they went about, namely, to take this city Bethel, as God had injoined them, doth lively set before our eyes the duty of all God's people, that is to say, readily to go about and set upon the work that God hath appointed them, yea, and this is to be done, whatsoever discouragements may stand up in the way to hinder them. For hath not He commanded them? And is not He able to remove those impediments, rather than they shall hinder His work in the hands of His servants? For otherwise, if we look not to God by faith, but what let is in the way, and be hindered thereby, we shall cast the commandment of God behind our back, and do as they who observe the wind, and therefore sow not; and look too much to the clouds, and therefore reap not; and so for fear of inconveniences we shall let pass necessary duties. Again, when we thrive and have good success, we bless God, and are merry; but if we be crossed, we curse ourselves with impatience. Whereas it ought to be enough to us, that God hath brought it to pass either thus, or otherwise. And beside the authority He hath over us, His bountiful rewarding of us in His service, ought to encourage us to address ourselves to all such work; and not only so, but further, seeing He commandeth and would have

us do it, as it may be most for our own ease, that is, willingly, readily, cheerfully; for the Lord loveth that, in all His service, as He loveth a cheerful giver. And we know (for our own parts) that men go untowardly about that work which they take in hand unwillingly. But I would that even they who are so, did go about that which they do by God's commandment cheerfully, and with delight for the Lord's sake; then should there many excrements be cut off from the infinite actions which are done in our lives, and with so much sin removed; many plagues and annoyances should be avoided from men's lives also. (*R. Rogers.*) **The spies saw a man come forth.**—*The spies and the man of Bethel:*—In this verse, where it is said that the spies met this man coming out of the city, somewhat is to be noted by occasion of the man and somewhat from the spies. By the man first, going in his simplicity out of the city (whether to save his life or upon some other necessary occasion), meeting with these spies, and falling into such a fright thereby, that either he must lose his life or betray the city (for the spies said to him, "Show us the way into the city and we will show thee mercy"). We may see what straits and difficulties we meet with in this life; for that peril which we neither fear nor once think of, may befall us, even to the hazarding of our lives, much more of our undoing, or the loss of the best of God's blessings that we enjoy, as wife, children, goods, &c. The Shunammite's child went into the field in the morning well, but died at noon. This we have to learn by occasion of the man. Now of the spies. The spies offered him kindness, if he would show them the way into the city; in that they dealt kindly with him, rather than roughly and cruelly, seeking such a matter at his hands, they did as became them. But he being one of the cursed nations, how could they promise him mercy? For though they did so to Rahab before, yet she turned to their religion; and so did the Gibeonites serve them as bondmen, and embraced their religion also. But no such thing can be said of this man, for he went unto the Hittites, out of the seven cursed nations, and dwelt there. I answer, we must interpret the laws of God against the Canaanites, and concerning the rooting them out, by mitigating them with this equity, that if they made peace with Israel, they should not root them out. And this appears by that which is written in Joshua, that these nations were rooted out, seeing none of them save the Gibeonites, made peace with the Hebrews. And this being so, teacheth all men to deal even with the bad kindly, and to be harmless toward them. And again, oh that we could deal pitifully, kindly, and lovingly with the miserable and the afflicted; and that all the gentlest means were used to reclaim offenders, of whom there is hope, such as are as this man of Bethel was, in great distress, which is not done but very rarely, and therefore is there much hardness of heart in those to whom it is neglected, and wilfulness, that carrieth them to all profaneness and impenitency. (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 27, 28. **Neither did Manasseh drive out.**—*Forsaking the Lord's work:*—Manasseh and Ephraim, and the rest of these tribes, did not fail in completing their warfare because they had begun imprudently, but because they did not continue believingly. The tower of conquest was unfinished, not because they had not counted the cost at the beginning, but because they forgot their infinite resources in the help of Jehovah. I. MEN FORSAKING A WORK WHICH HAD BEEN BEGUN AFTER LONG PREPARATION. The plagues of Egypt, the miracles of the wilderness, the gifts of the manna and other supplies, and the long period of discipline in the desert, were all designed to lead up to the full inheritance of the land. II. MEN FORSAKING A WORK WHICH HAD ALREADY BEEN PROSECUTED WITH GREAT ENERGY AND AT GREAT COST. The Church has thrown away not a little energy for want of just a little more. III. MEN FORSAKING A WORK ABOUT WHICH THEY HAD CHERISHED ARDENT HOPES. The whole way up from Egypt had been a long path of expectation. We see here brilliant hopes blasted for ever for want of a little more faith and a little more service. How many of our once cherished visions have fled for the same reason! IV. MEN FORSAKING A WORK IN WHICH THEY HAD ALREADY WON SPLENDID TRIUMPHS. The path of their past prowess was almost vocal against this sinful inaction and unbelief. V. MEN FORSAKING A WORK TO WHICH GOD HAD COMMANDED THEM, IN WHICH GOD HAD MARVELLOUSLY HELPED THEM, AND IN WHICH HE NO LESS WAITED TO HELP THEM STILL. They did not "remember the years of the right hand of the Most High." "They forgat His works." No less did they forget His absolute commands, and His unbroken promises. (*F. G. Marchant.*) *A good work forsaken:*—We here learn how ready men are to leave and forsake a good course, although they have hardly, and with much ado, been

brought to embrace and fasten upon it; which much concerneth us to mark. For we are easily deceived about this, and think both of ourselves and others, that if we begin to dislike and turn away from some gross and common faults that we were wont to commit, then the worst is past with us, and that we ought justly to be reckoned among the godly; whereas it is nothing so, but we be yet, for all that, far off. For a far greater matter is required to the endeavour effectual calling to repentance may be approved of God, and be sound indeed, how we ought to try and search into ourselves, and cannot now stand about it. But although we were truly turned to God, and had, as these, obeyed God for a time with a good heart, yet ought we to fear danger, in respect of our own frailty, and according to the present occasion, when we see to what point these tribes came, for all they had followed the Lord commendably for a time, in beginning to cast out the nations as they were commanded. And the reason of this, to wit, that we should thus carefully look to ourselves, is this, that we are reformed but in part, and that in small part; in which respect yet, because we have received some grace, we are able thereby to desire and go about to do God some service, and specially at some time, namely, while we be watchful to hold under our rebellious passions, assisted by grace; but what then? For we having a sea of corruption ever flowing in us, and our own concupiscence beside outward objects enticing us a contrary way; it must be drained and purged out daily, by little and little, and not be let alone in us, lest it should choke and drown the grace that we have received; which if it be, we become impotent by and by, so that we do not only cease to obey, but we are carried rather as with a stream to any evil that we be tempted to; and namely, to this one here mentioned that overtook these tribes; that is, to be weary of well doing; and so much the rather, seeing there are so many allurements and occasions in every place to provoke us and set us forward. And although we are not without hope, nor naked in the midst of all these storms, yet if we know not these things, yea, and if also we do not resist carefully such evil as I have mentioned, neither strive to nourish such sparkles of grace as are kindled in us, our hearts being set wholly hereupon, as the weightiest thing that we have to deal in; what marvel is it, though we fall from the goodness that was wrought and begun in us, and so become others than we were before? (*R. Rogers.*) *Attitude of the world towards the Church*:—"The Canaanites would dwell in that land," says the historian, repeating the words used in reference to the same tribe and the same places elsewhere (Josh. xvii. 12). The Hebrew word rendered "would dwell," intimates that the Canaanites wished to arrange the matter agreeably; that they made friendly overtures to the men of Manasseh to be permitted to remain—a permission which was granted them on condition of their paying tribute. Such is the attitude which, in these letter days, the world frequently assumes towards the Church of Christ in Christian countries. It is willing enough to pay tribute, both in gold and outward forms of deference, if only the Church will allow it a peaceable lodging and refrain from using against it the sword of the Spirit. Too often has the Church, like the men of Manasseh, consented to accept tribute money, whether of the State or of private individuals, as the price of permitting the world to remain unmolested within its borders; and how often has she found, in her bitter experience, the degrading and enslaving effect of such compromises—verifying to the letter the prediction of Joshua in regard to such unhallowed connections (Josh. xxiii. 13). (*L. H. Wiseman, M.A.*)

Vers. 34–36. **The Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain.**—*A neglect of duty injurious to others*:—So that we see that the negligence of the other tribes in suffering the forbidden nations to remain and wax strong caused these their brethren to be wronged, and to go without their due which God had allotted them. For if they had kept their enemies out they might have been able now to help this tribe of Dan: who, if the house of Joseph had not done more than the rest, they had been left almost without habitation. And by this way we may see that men's sins do not only redound to their own hurt, but also to the hurt of others. Whereas none are hurt, neither themselves, by those that fear to offend God, and be careful to do their duties, but they may receive great benefit thereby. But the other hurt many as well as themselves. As we see bad parents, what woe they hoard up for their unhappy children, as Ahab and the like. As also, how many souls doth an ignorant, idle, or scandalous minister destroy and cause to perish. (*R. Rogers.*)

CHAPTER II.

VERS. 1–5. **An angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim.**—*The Israelites at Bochim* :—I. The ASSEMBLY convened: "All the children of Israel." II. The MESSENGER employed. This "angel of the Lord" is said to "come up from Gilgal to Bochim." Gilgal was the scene of interesting transactions between the Lord and the Israelites. The Lord, therefore, in the riches of His mercy, again visits this people; and at Bochim revives the impressions which had been felt and the resolutions which had been formed at Gilgal. III. The ADDRESS delivered. 1. A statement of what the Lord had done for this people: "I made you to go up out of Egypt," that land of slavery, that scene of degradation and toil, "and have brought you unto the land which I sware unto your fathers." This was the completion of His work. It was a proof of the exceeding greatness of His power, and also of His faithfulness; for Canaan was the inheritance which He had engaged to give. 2. Next they are told what the Lord had promised to them: "I said, I will never break My covenant with you." Here was additional favour, and a solemn engagement of fidelity. It had been well if their fidelity had resembled His; then would their peace have been as a river and their prosperity permanent as a rock! 3. They are also reminded of what the Lord required of them: "Ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land." Nothing could be more reasonable. One would naturally have expected their prompt and persevering compliance. 4. But it is affecting to learn what the Lord received from them—the manner in which He was requited for all His favours: "Ye have not obeyed My voice." The charge is express and pointed. They had leagued with the Canaanites, spared their altars, connived at their idolatry; and all this in direct opposition to the command of Jehovah: "Why have ye done this?" Their sin may be accounted for, but it can never be justified. Indolence may partly account for it: to oppose evil required vigilance and exertion. Covetousness, perhaps, had its influence; they might join with the Canaanites in hope of sordid gain. Love of idolatry, a secret inclination to the practices of heathen nations, might induce them to spare their altars and to palliate their sin. But unbelief was the grand cause, and lay at the root of all their disobedience. 5. Lastly is recorded what the Lord threatened against them: "Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out," &c. Here was righteous retribution; they were punished by weapons of their own making; nor can we wonder at this mark of the Divine displeasure. IV. The EFFECT produced (vers. 4, 5). From this remarkable fact let us apply a question to ourselves: what influence has the Word preached among us? In other words, where are your tears, and where are your prayers? Thank God, neither the one nor the other are altogether restrained. But why are they not more frequent? It is owing to the hardness of the human heart, and is an affecting proof of the deep degeneracy of man. Terrors do not move; mercies do not melt; the most attractive truths are often heard without emotion or concern; and when some appearance of penitence does exist, how transient its continuance, and how unfruitful its influence! (*T. Kidd.*) *The weepers* :—The voice of that weeping echoes through the ages, and Bochim becomes classic ground in the moral history of the world. I. THERE IS A TERRIBLE PHYSICAL AND MORAL CONFUSION PALPABLE ON THE VERY SURFACE OF MAN'S LIFE, which appears darker and deadlier the more you penetrate the depths; while the profound instinct of his being, made in the image of the one God, demands order and unity. All the heathen hecatombs, all the theodicies of philosophy, are attempts to explain the mystery. They are at least man's protests against, his struggle to be free from, the desperate confusions of his physical and moral life. II. THERE IS IN MAN A NATIVE TENDENCY TO MISTAKE THE KIND OF HELP WHICH HE IS TO EXPECT FROM GOD. From the Old and from the New Testament we hear alike the cry of man's natural heart, "The rest is near." There is the undying hope in the heart of humanity that God will give rest. Lamech thought that Noah would give it, Abraham that Isaac would give it, the Jews saw it in Canaan, David in Solomon, Ezra in the restoration, the early Christians in the Church. Suffering is to be destroyed, so runs the human dream, by the destruction of sin. The devil is to be slain, and all things that now tempt man to transgression shall woo him sweetly to virtue and joy. III. GOD'S REST, THE TRUE CANAAN FOR WHICH WE ALL ARE PINING, MUST SPRING FROM WITHIN, AND BE DEPENDENT ON THE VIGOUR OF THE INWARD LIFE. IV. IN THIS SCENE OF DISCIPLINE, WHERE MAN EXISTS OF NECESSITY AS AN IMPERFECT MORAL BEING, HE MUST HAVE THRONGS OF TEMPTERS AROUND HIM. He gives them strength by his

want of firmness, by his system of foolish and timid compromise. But you have God's covenant as a rock to stand on, God's promise as a star to cheer, God's strength to nerve the spirit and to harden it to endurance, and God's sword, sharp and gleaming, to cut out before you the path to victory. V. THE BITTER TRUTH, DISCOVERED AT BOCHIM, IS THE DEEP, SAD UNDERTONE OF THE MUSIC OF HISTORY. Perhaps those who are most alive to its higher interests and aims find it saddest. But for them this sadness becomes holy; it is part of the sorrow of Christ, which is the germ of everlasting joy. It is not in anger, in its deepest purpose, but in love, that this weeping is ordained to us. Life is richer, nobler, if sadder, under such conditions, as we shall understand at last when we stand white-robed before the throne. (*J. B. Brown, B.A.*) *Thorough-going Christianity*:—The picture here presented to us is that of the people of God stopping short in their career of triumph, not following up and following out the great salvation which the Lord has wrought. They thus incur His stern rebuke and questioning: "Why have ye done this?" Many reasons, more or less plausible, might be given. They were weary of the wilderness and of war; they had had enough of wandering and fighting; they longed for quiet rest and peace. Motives also of seeming pity and prudence might sway them: how hard to cut off with so fell a swoop, and in one wholesale sacrifice, so many hosts and households, of whom some at least might yet be reclaimed to Jehovah's service, or made useful in some way to His people. Then, as these relentings of tenderness or considerations of expediency occasioned hesitation and delay, their enemies recovered courage and became formidable again. No wonder if, under some such influences as these, proposals of truce and compromise began to be welcome to Israel; and the wisdom of God gave way before the policy of man. It was a policy, however, alike unwarrantable and disastrous; unwarrantable, considering all that God had done for them and the assurance they had that He would not break His covenant with them (ver. 1); and disastrous in the issue, for the error was irretrievable. I. THE SIN. Let me speak to the young Christian, the recent convert. What now have you more urgent on hand than to make good your position and reap the full fruit of the deliverance wrought out for you? What better opportunity for carrying out fully the sternest injunctions of your Lord regarding them? How does He bid you treat these enemies? "Mortify your members that are on the earth." "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." Or take another instance. Such a season as I am speaking of is the very season for remodelling your whole plan of life—its pursuits, its habits, its companionship. You come out, O believer, from the secret place of your God, where He has been speaking peace to you—you come out into the world a new man; and now, when all is fresh, and before you have committed yourself, now is the very time for arranging methodically your general course of conduct and all its details. How are you to meet with your former associates? On what terms and with what degree of intimacy? When and how are you to join yourselves to the company commonly called godly, cast in your lot with them, and avow yourself partakers of their toils, their trials, and their joys? What, moreover, are to be your rules for the exercise of private devotion and the cultivation of personal piety? What the system of your studious preparation for heaven? You may take your ground, unfurl your standard, and announce your watchword so unequivocally that few ever after will think of trying to shake or to disconcert you. But alas! too generally, as to all these matters, you have no definite plan of life at all. Hence vacillation, fitfulness, inconsistency, excess, and deficiency by turns. The opportunity of setting up a high standard and a high aim is lost; and soon, amid the snares of worldly conformity and the awkwardness of the false shame that will not let you retrace your steps, you deeply sigh for the day of your visitation, when you might have started from a higher platform and run a higher race than you can now hope ever to realise. II. THE INEXCUSABLENESS OF THE SIN. Hear the remonstrance which God addresses to Israel (ver. 1), and consider His threefold appeal. Look back to the past, and call to mind from what a state the Lord has rescued you, at what a price, by what a work of power. Look around on your present circumstances; see how the Lord has performed all that He sware to your fathers; the land is yours; and it is a goodly land. And if, in looking forward to the future, you have any misgivings, has He not said, "I will never break My covenant with you"? What can you ask more? Are these considerations not sufficient to bind you to the whole work and warfare of the high calling of God, and to make cowardice and compromise exceeding sinful? III. THE DANGEROUS AND DISASTROUS CONSEQUENCES OF THE SIN. Hear the awful sentence of God (ver 3), and then see how the children

of Israel lift up their voice and weep (ver. 4). Well is the place named Bochim: it is indeed a melting scene. The golden opportunity is lost: their error is not to be retrieved; its bitter fruits are to be reaped from henceforth many days. A sad sight truly; but sadder, if possible, is the spectacle of a Christian professor suffering, in after-years, from the insufficiency of his works and the first foundation of his Christianity; from his having allowed some evil thing in his bosom, some Achan in his camp; from his having stopped short when he should have gone on unto perfection. (*R. S. Candlish, D.D.*) *From Gilgal to Bochim*:—Gilgal was the first camp of Israel after Jordan was actually crossed; it was at once a goal and a starting-point. To Christians it represents that position of vantage, that excellence of endowment whence they go forth in obedience and faith to subdue their spiritual foes. Had Israel been wise, they would have abode in Gilgal until their work of conquest was complete and the land all their own. Doubtless the angel first appeared in that deserted camp, doubtless he followed the people thence, in order to remind them that he ought to have found them there. But they had not been wise; they had not extirpated the nations, but had mingled with them and learnt their works; they had abandoned Gilgal, from whence, under the strong restraints of religious and military discipline, they might have carried through the work of conquest, and had settled themselves in some place of their own choosing: therefore, the angel of the Lord followed and found and reproached them; then they wept, and named the place Bochim—"the weepers." "From Gilgal to Bochim." In nature it is an ascent, but in grace it is a tremendous fall; the one named from what God did, the other from what they felt. And surely it is very expressive of a great deal amongst ourselves; surely many of us are settled in a place of feelings without acts, emotions without results, reproofs which only produce tears. "From Gilgal to Bochim." How often is the story repeated in our spiritual life! Canaan is our kingdom—that kingdom of life and immortality, of light and holiness, which is already ours; not, indeed, for quiet and absolute possession, but for steady and victorious occupation. The seven nations of the Canaanites, alien intruders on the sacred soil, are the seven deadly sins which, with all their evil kith and kin, withstand our entry and dispute our enjoyment of that holy land whereof God hath made us kings and priests in Christ. It is our duty and our charge, as well as our interest, to extirpate these sins—to make a clean sweep of them, great and small. But we do not; we gain some splendid victories, we lay some threatening strongholds low, we deliver some large territories from the dominion of the foe, we do enough to show that we could do all; and then we cease. Because we would not be at the trouble, relying on the grace of God, to cast out all the sins which He detests; because we held our hand and allowed some of them to remain in their old places in our life and character; therefore hath God also restrained the working of His grace, and hath allowed those very faults to become our constant plagues, thorns in our sides, unfailing causes of irritation, self-reproach, and weakness. What we want is to be up and doing, to make a vigorous move, to get back to Gilgal, and from thence to go forth patient and resolved to complete the conquest of our own spiritual realm. Let us occupy once more that place of vantage to which God hath brought us by election and by grace; let us realise the invincible strength which is assured unto those Christians who wait upon their God in prayer and sacraments; let us rely upon that strength not to be the substitute for our own efforts, but to inspire them with supernatural ardour, to crown them with supernatural success. (*R. Winterbotham, M.A.*) *Bochim; or, the weepers*:—I. How HOPEFUL. One could not desire anything better apparently than this. 1. They were all attentive hearers. There was not one that looked about him, or that forgot the pointed words that were spoken. It is a great thing to win people's attention. 2. They were very feeling people. 3. They were all sorrowful hearers. Alas! that such drops did not precede a shower of grace, but passed away as the morning cloud. 4. Aye, and they all became professing hearers; for as soon as ever that service was over they held another, and "they sacrificed unto Jehovah." Now let me turn to the other side and show you that there was nothing permanently good in Bochim's sudden water-floods. II. Their weeping was VERY DISAPPOINTING. 1. I half suspect that their tears and lamentations were produced as much by the preacher's person as by anything else. It was the Angel of the Lord, and who would not be moved at His presence? It may be a great blessing to you to hear a very useful preacher, but if you depend upon him in the least it will be mischievous to you. Seek that your repentance may be a repentance which is wrought by the Spirit of God in your heart and conscience.

Sham religion is an injury rather than a benefit. 2. Again, I am afraid that the repentance of these people had a great deal to do with their natural softness. They were tender and excitable because there was little grit in their nature; their manliness was of a degenerate type. They feared to go to battle for God; they dreaded the noise and the slaughter. They were, moreover, easily moved by their fellowmen, and took shape from those who lived near them. One grain of faith is better than a gallon of tears. A drop of genuine repentance is more precious than a torrent of weeping. 3. There is another thing about the weeping of these people, and that is, that it was caused a great deal by threatenings of punishment. Every murderer repents at the gallows, they say; that is, he repents of being hanged, but he does not repent of having killed others. We ought clearly to discern between the natural terrors that come of vivid descriptions of the wrath to come and that real spiritual touch of God the Holy Ghost which breaks and melts the heart and then casts it into another mould. These people were deceived as to the depth and sincerity of their own feelings. Doubtless they reckoned themselves choice penitents when they were only cowardly tremblers, labouring under impressions which were as useless as they were transient. Their feeling was but as a meteor's blaze, shedding strong but momentary day. 4. Next, these people had not repented, for they did not bring their children up rightly. The next generation, it is said, knew not the Lord, neither the mighty works of the Lord. If parents make known the things of God to their children it cannot be said that the children do not know the works of God. If parents teach with affectionate earnestness, their children learn at least the letter of the truth. Woe unto you, with all your tears, if you have no regard for your household, and no care to bring up your children in the fear of God. 5. I know that these people did not repent aright, because they went from bad to worse. They went from weeping before God to worshipping Baal. The more tender you are, if afterwards you harden yourselves, so much the greater will be your guilt; and if you humble yourselves before God in mere appearance, so much the more terrible will be your doom if that humbleness departs and you go back to the sin from which you professed to turn. 6. I know that these people were not penitents, because God did not take away the chastisement. The punishment which He threatened He brought upon them: He gave them over to the spoilers and sold them to their enemies. But where there is a hearty repentance of sin, God will never lay punishment on a man. He will forgive him and receive him to His bosom and restore him. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The failure of obedience*:—The accusation against them at Bochim was negative rather than positive. They were not charged with any specific act of avowed rebellion, but with having failed to obey the voice of God. But when the Church has begun to habitually neglect any one of her Lord's known commands—still more when she begins to "break one of these least commandments, and teach men so"—the day is not far distant when, unless arrested in her career by the mercy or the judgments of God, she will be found openly consorting with the mammon-worshippers by whom she is surrounded. Even so it was in the history before us. 1. The Canaanites in this history represent the enemies of the Church of God, and also the inward besetting sins of individual members of that Church. Need we name pride, and lust, and covetousness, and self-conceit, and envy, and worldliness, and impatience, and fretfulness, and revengefulness—a band of brothers, tall sons of Anak, diverse in feature, yet all showing the ancestry and lineaments of the serpent? Need we mention others of the same kindred—jealousy, and sloth, and worldliness, and levity, and procrastination, and presumption, and unbelief? 2. It follows, then, that the believer's warfare is not completed when he has been made a partaker of peace through believing in Christ; for "we are made partakers of Christ" only "if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end." "Put off," says the Scripture, "the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts." Mighty task!—for this "old man" is not easily ousted from his ancient habitation. He fights hard for possession; and we must "give diligence," even after we have obtained our "calling and election," to "make it sure." 3. We are reminded that many of the spiritual Israel stop short of a full salvation, for it is to be remembered that these men had partially obeyed. They had begun well. 4. The history illustrates the causes of the weakness of the Church and people of God. (1) One of these causes was indolence. "They neglected to destroy the nations, not because of want of inclination, but because they were deficient in strength in consequence of their guilt; not from feelings of compassion, but from want of holy zeal and from slothfulness." The athlete cannot retain his strength without daily exercise; the

vocalist cannot retain his power and command of voice without incessant practise; and the child of God cannot go on to perfection without a daily spiritual gymnastic, "exercising himself with a view to godliness," as an athlete with a view to the games. Faith and love, correcting the indolence of our nature, will make this holy toil delightful. (2) Another cause of spiritual weakness is a secret love of sin. In our own day there are degraded Englishmen who have settled among the savages of New Hebrides or Fiji on purpose to be free from all moral restraint, and who outdo the worst of the heathen in every kind of abomination. In religious families there are sons and daughters who, although outwardly restrained by the circumstances of their position, cherish a bitter hatred of religion and a secret love for a dissipated life. And even in the hearts of the faithful what strange occasional lingerings towards evil! What treacherous trifling with things fordidden! (3) Another cause of spiritual weakness is unbelief, if indeed this one cause does not sum up and exhaust the whole subject. Unbelief is vitally connected with that alienation of heart and affections from God in which the deepest ruin of man consists. And is it for this cause, O ye Israel of God, that ye are so slow to believe even in the possibility of being sanctified wholly, and of being preserved blameless unto the coming of the Lord? Is this the reason why ye so stoutly contend that although the inbred foe, the spiritual Canaanite, may be humbled and put to tribute, it is impossible he should be utterly destroyed on this side the grave? When the heart pants after the living God, is it pleasant to think that, in this life at least, He will never take full and complete possession, but that some damnable lust will always be there to dispute with Him for the supremacy? (*L. H. Wiseman, M.A.*) *The evil of disobedience to God*:—Mark and note right well that it is an evil thing under any pretext whatever to depart in any degree from the commandment of the Most High God. Whatsoever may be the law which God gives, either to the whole race or to His chosen, they will find their safety in keeping close to it. But Israel forgot this. Soldiering was hard work—storming cities and warring with men who attacked them with chariots of iron was heroic service. All this required strong faith and untiring perseverance, and in these virtues the Israelites were greatly deficient; and so, in certain places, they said to the Canaanites, "Let us be neighbours: let us dwell together." At any rate, it could do no harm to study their archæology, and go to their temples, and see the gods they worshipped, and get a general acquaintance with the advanced thought of the period; for the Canaanites were a greatly advanced people—they were the advanced thinkers of the period. Tolerance led to imitation, and Israel became as vile as the heathen whom the Lord had condemned, and the Israelites became a mixed race, in whose veins there flowed a measure of Canaanite blood. Yes; if you depart from God's Word by a hair's breadth you know not where you will end. I would to God that in these degenerate times we had back again somewhat of the stern spirit of the Cameronians and the Covenanters; for now men play fast and loose with God, and think that anything they please to do will satisfy the Most High. The offal and the refuse will suffice for sacrifice for Him; but as to strict obedience to His Word, they can by no means abide it. Mischief will surely come of this lax state of things to the Churches of this day as surely as affliction came abundantly to Israel of old. Note, next, that whenever one sin is allowed we may say of it, "Gad, a troop cometh." It seemed a pardonable sort of sin to be gentle to these people and not to obey God's severer word; but then, what came next? Why, soon they, the children of Jehovah, were found worshipping before the horrible Baal. Soon they had gone farther, and the unclean goddess Ashtaroth became their delight; and anon they forgot Jehovah altogether amid their deities and demons. With these errors in religion there had come in all sorts of errors in morals, for every fashion of immorality and lewdness defiled the worshippers of Baal-Peor, Baal-Berith, and Baal-Zebub; and the chosen people of God could scarcely be distinguished from the heathen nations among which they dwelt, or if distinguished at all, it was by their greater sin, inasmuch as they were transgressing against superior light, and holding down their consciences which God had rendered by His teaching much more tender than the consciences of those about them. Backslide a little, and you are on the way to utter apostasy. The mother of mischief is small as a midge's egg; hatch it, and you shall see an evil bird larger than an ostrich. The least wrong has in it an all but infinity of evil. So Israel went aside farther and farther from God because they regarded not their way, and did not in all things obey the Lord. But then comes in a truth which, though it may seem black in the telling, is bright in the essence of it. God did not leave His people without chastise-

ment. The Lord laid His blows upon them thick and heavy. But, before He did this, He sent a messenger to rebuke them. It is ever the Lord's way to give space for repentance ere He executes vengeance. The axes which were carried before the Roman magistrates by the lictors were bound up in bundles of rods. It is said that when a prisoner was before the magistrate the lictor began to untie the rods, and with these the culprit was beaten; meanwhile the judge looked in the prisoner's face and heard his defence, and if he saw reason for averting the capital sentence, because of the repentance which the offender expressed, then he only smote him with the rod, but the axe remained unused. But if, when every rod was taken off, the culprit was still hardened, and the crime was a capital one and clearly proven, then the axe was used, and used all the more sternly because space had been given for penitence, and the rods had been used in vain. When the rod is despised the axe is ready. It is certainly so with God: He waiteth to be gracious, but when patience cannot hope for penitence then justice takes her turn, and her stroke is terrible. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

The rushing of tears:—If this hour we could realise God's goodness toward us, and our conduct toward Him, a great grief would seize upon us, and repentance would meet remorse, and remorse would meet ingratitude, and memories of the past would jostle the fears of the future, and silence would be broken by sobs and shrieks. 1. I have first to remark that many Christian people have reason for a good deal of mourning. What have you been doing these ten, twenty, thirty, forty years? Did not God lead you out of Egypt? Did He not part for you the Red Sea of trouble, and has He not rained manna all around about your camp? Did He not divide the Jordan of death for your loved ones, until they went through dry-shod, not wetting even the soles of their feet? Has He not put clusters of blessings upon your table, and fed you with the finest of the wheat? And yet, we must confess, we have, like the Israelites, made a league with the world. Three-fourths of our Christian life has been wasted. Oh, weep for our derelictions! weep for our wanderings! weep for our lost opportunities that will never return! There is great reason for sadness on the part of some parents when they look over their families. You know that there must be a mighty change in your household before you can all live together in eternity. Can you placidly contemplate an eternal separation from any of your loved ones? Things are looking that way. Their opportunities of salvation less and less; your opportunities of plying them with religious motives less and less. The prospect that God's invitation will continue to them, less and less. The day of their mercy almost gone, yet they have not put up one earnest prayer, or repented of one sin, and not given one hopeful sign, and death coming to snap the conjugal bond, and break up the fraternal and the filial tie. An aged woman came to me. I said, "Are you seeking the salvation of your soul?" She said, "No, I have sought and found. I came in to ask your prayers for my sons. They are on the wrong road." O Lord Jesus, are we to be parted from any we have loved? Will some of us be saved and some of us be lost? Which one will it be missing, missing, missing, for eternity? I say farther: there are impenitent souls who ought to be sad from the fact that there are sins they have committed that cannot be corrected either in this world or the world to come. Suppose a man at fifty years of age becomes a Christian, but he has been all his life on the other side. He is a father. He comes to Christ now; but can he arrest the fact that for twenty or thirty years over his children he was wielding a wrong influence, and they have started in the wrong direction? And if you come to God in the latter part of your life, when you have given your children an impulse in the wrong direction, those ten, or fifteen, or twenty years of example in the wrong direction will be mightier than the few words you can utter now in the right direction. So it is with the influence you have had anywhere in community. If you have all these years given countenance to those who are neglecting religion, can you correct that? Your common sense says "No." Here is an engineer on a locomotive. He is taking a long train of cars loaded with passengers. He comes on and sees a red flag. He says, "What do I care for the red flag?" He pushes on the train, and comes to another red flag. He says, "I don't care for the red flag." After a while he sees that the bridge is down; but he is by a marsh, and he leaps and is not damaged. Does that stop the train? No! It goes on crash! crash! crash! That is the history of some men who have been converted. I congratulate them, but I cannot hide the fact that they started a train of influences in the wrong direction; and though, in the afternoon of their life, they may leap off the train, the train goes on. So, also, there is

occasion for sadness in the peril that surrounds every unforgiven soul. And so you may go on placidly, smoothly, gaily for a while in your sin, but the hurricane will swoop upon your souls. Without God, without hope! Oh, what an orphanage, what an exile, what a desolation! Moan! moan! for thy lost estate. Have you not had a chance for heaven? "Ah," you say, "that is the worst of it. That is what makes me weep." Was your father bad? Was your mother wicked? "No," you say. "Say nothing against my mother. If there was ever a good woman, she was one; and I remember how, in her old days, and when bent with years, and in her plain frock she knelt down and prayed for my soul, and with her apron wiped away the tears. Oh, I have trampled on her broken heart. I am a wretch undone. Who will pray for me? I am so sick of sin. I am so weary of the world!" No wonder you weep, for the greatest condemnation of the last day will be for those who had pious parents and who resisted their admonition. But what is a sadder thought is, that some of these people not only stay out of the kingdom of God themselves, but they will not let their children come in. "You never invited me to Christ. You stood in my way. You gave a wrong example. Father, mother, you ruined my soul!" 2. But I remember that there are tears of joy as well as tears of sorrow, and how the foundations of the deep would break up if one hundred or one thousand souls would march up and take the kingdom of heaven! But there are some who have not come. They will not come. They will not repent. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *Sorrow not repentance:*—"Bochim" might be widely inscribed in the land of Palestine, if thereby to mark the place where universal lamentations have been heard. Crying was a frequent sight and sound there. It was sometimes uncontrollable. It was often mechanical and artificial. Trouble usually provokes it, and fears and tears are closely related. But sobbings and penitence are not so nearly allied as we might expect. The vain Xerxes, as he sat on his silver throne, overlooking his vast fleet and outstretched army, and weeping to think how in a hundred years every life before him would have perished, yet who arrayed his thousands for needless and speedy slaughter, might have better spared his grief, while curbing his pride. Sentiment is not sanctity. Sorrow is not sobriety. In the abodes of shame there are burning tears and pitiful groans without a wish for a better life. The trappings of woe are common; the resolve to remove its cause is not as common. Reformatories are full of victims of their own evil choices, and many a sigh they heave over a wicked past, but it is only because of the ills it has brought upon them. They like the sin as well as ever. Could it be separated from its penalty they would be only too willing to commit it. There are three classes of weepers: the repentant, mourning both over the wrong done and the result it has necessitated, and determined never to offend again; the regretful, intending to keep from the like in future, but only slightly moved because of its evil character; the suffering, thinking only of the disaster, but ready to repeat the deed so soon as it is safe. To the second class, for the most part, the "Bochimites" belong. They wish for prosperity and ease, and are more sorry for the "thorning" and "snaring" in store than for having disobeyed the word of Jehovah. (*De Witt S. Clark.*) *Bochim:*—I. Observe, first, THAT THE REPROVER OF THE PEOPLE IS TERMED "AN ANGEL." "An angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal." But the first utterance carries us to the thought of One higher than angel or archangel. The speaker describes Himself as the deliverer of Israel out of Egypt, and He finishes with the denunciation, "Ye have not obeyed My voice." The burden of His prophecy is worthy of the Divine speaker, for it is the simple enunciation of the fundamental truth of all religion—man in covenant with God, and bound to comply with the terms of that covenant. II. Consider THE RESULT OF THE PROPHESYING. The general result was but transitory. The people wept and sacrificed unto the Lord. But no amendment ensued. The whole effect was a momentary outburst of feeling and a hasty sacrifice. Most true picture of the reception of the Word of God in after-time. It is sensational or emotional religion against which Bochim is our warning. There are two principal elements of this fruitless sorrow. 1. The first is want of depth of soul. 2. The second is the "after revolt of the human mind against the supernatural." Godly sorrow issues in a repentance not to be repented of, in that thorough turning of the life to God's service from which, in the hottest fire of temptation, there is never a turning back to the way of evil again. (*Bp. Woodford.*) *Wasted emotion:*—In California, where so much of the land requires irrigation, there is a serious effort being made to devise some scheme by which the water that goes to waste in times of flood can be

stored up and used in times of drought. It has long been known that enough flood water flows back to the sea in the rainy season to more than multiply the state's resource for irrigation. Therefore it is felt that if some system is workable whereby flood waters can be impounded and saved from waste, hundreds of thousands of acres of now useless lands would be made fruitful. What a wonderful thing it would be if some such scheme could be devised in the higher realm of human emotion! There is enough real heart-benevolence stirred up to fill the land with kindness and bring about human brotherhood everywhere. But it often goes to waste without producing any practical result. Many people are moved to tears by a novel or the story of some suffering fellow-being, and for a time there is a flood of charitable feeling that surges through the soul; but it runs to waste, and when opportunity for real helpfulness comes the emotion has passed away. (*L. A. Banks.*)

Vers. 6–10. **The people served the Lord all the days of Joshua.**—*Joshua and "another generation":*—I. THE POWER OF A GREAT MAN TO ADAPT HIMSELF TO CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES, AND TO BE EQUALLY GREAT UNDER VARYING CONDITIONS. Many a man great in conquest is a nonentity in peaceful times. The great warrior does not always make a great statesman. Joshua, on the contrary, was the moral ruler of the nation in peace as well as the military commander of the army in war. The Romans are said to have conquered like savages and ruled like philosophic statesmen. Joshua, too, excelled in war and peace. Perhaps he was greatest in peace, because "he that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city." Contrast Napoleon in St. Helena with Joshua at Timnath Heres. II. THE FORMATIVE INFLUENCE OF ONE GREAT LIFE IN GIVING CHARACTER TO AN AGE. Such men as Joshua are necessarily exceptional. There is a Divine economy in the sending of great men. Like miracles, they must not be allowed to degenerate into commonplaces. There is a reserve in producing great leaders: they come one in a century—in some instances, one in a millennium. Men of the Joshua type are sent to give a character to their time. The history of the world is largely the history of single champions. III. THE LIMITATIONS OF A PERSONAL INFLUENCE—even one of the most powerful kind; for we see here the strange capacity of one age to prove untrue to the best traditions of that which preceded it: "There arose another generation," &c. 1. This generation suffered from the lack of direct personal testimony. They could not say, "We speak that which we do know, and testify that which we have seen." All they knew was by hearsay, and spirituality must be very vigorous and intense to breathe life into hearsay. 2. These people sadly under-estimated, and therefore ignored, the value of historic record—"knew not," &c. They severed themselves from the past. 3. This was an age of ease, and, as such, the least productive of noble manhood. These were poverty-stricken times. The nation was no longer braced by one common ambition, or bent upon one object. They had lapsed into a state of indolence and indifference. Moreover, there was no central supreme power, for they had leaders only in times of war, and the old leader and his subordinates were dead. This was a time when a great character was most needed to save the nation from degeneracy. Such ages often succeed the iron ages of history. I am not sure that we, as Christians, have not lost much of the robustness of the past age. IV. WHAT A RESPONSIBILITY IS INVOLVED IN THIS SUCCESSION OF AGES TO MAINTAIN THE CONTINUITY, to be worthy followers of those who through faith and patience have inherited the promises; to be, of a truth, successors of the apostles and of other holy men! V. THANK GOD, THE RECORD IN OUR TEXT IS ONLY FRAGMENTARY. That age was not a final break upon the progress of revelation. History is progressive after all. Span the centuries. Don't let the point of observation be too narrow or near. Ascending from lowlands to highlands there are undulations; but take a span large enough, and you will find that it is an ascent all the way. So in the history of our race. God has been advancing throughout all time in spite of the "dark ages" of the world, and in spite of human relapses into sin. (*D. Davies.*) *Man:*—I. THE MORAL OBLIGATION OF EVERY MEMBER OF OUR RACE (ver. 7). 1. All creatures are the servants of God, but they serve Him in different ways. (1) Some without a will. Inanimate matter and insentient life. (2) Some with their will. Brutes—instinct. (3) Some against their will. Wicked men and fallen angels. (4) Some by their will. Saints and angels. 2. To serve Him in this way is the obligation of the race. But there is one condition indispensable to this—supreme love for Him as the Sovereign. This will—(1) Induce man to attain an under-

standing of His law; (2) prompt him cheerfully to obey it. II. THE SERVICE OF ONE GOOD MAN TO OUR RACE. 1. That a man can induce his race to serve the Lord. Joshua did. 2. That a man, to do this, must himself be a servant of the Lord. Joshua was. 3. That, however useful a man may be to his race in this respect, he must die. Joshua died. III. THE MELANCHOLY SUCCESSION OF OUR RACE (ver. 10). 1. The succession involves no extinction. The mighty generations that are gone live on some other shore. 2. The mode of the succession involves a moral cause. We say the "mode," not the "fact." If the race continue to multiply as now, the limitation of the world's area and provisions would require a succession. This planet was probably intended as a stepping-stone to another. Had there been no sin, however, instead of the succession taking place through the grave, it might have been through a "chariot of fire," as in the case of Elijah. IV. THE DEGENERATING TENDENCY OF OUR RACE. 1. This degenerating tendency is often found stronger than the most elevating influences of truth. Peter fell in the very presence of Christ. 2. This degenerating tendency indicates the necessity of a conscious reliance upon the gracious help of God. (*Homilist.*) *Israel's apostasy*:—I. THE CHARACTER OF THE JEWS AT THE DEATH OF JOSHUA. II. THE APOSTASY OF THE SUCCEEDING GENERATION. 1. The nature of their apostasy. God is jealous of His own honour; and to unite His name with idols, and to His worship to join the revolting orgies of Ashtoreth, was diabolism, and must be judged and punished. 2. Their apostasy was intensified by all the distinguishing privileges and blessings they had enjoyed. As virtue is proportioned in vigour to the temptations resisted, so transgression is proportioned to the forces of conscience, education, example and blessing which have been fought with and conquered. Nor was this all their sin. To the list must be added disobedience. They refused to execute the Divine command to expel the Canaanites from the land. It was terrible surgery, and not murder, that the Israelites were commanded to perform as touching the heathen idolators—a true and just surgery, cutting away unflinchingly the diseased part, that themselves might remain sound. Stopping short in the operation, they became infected with the moral leprosy which made the Canaanites loathsome to heaven and earth (Lev. xviii. 21–30; Deut. xii. 30–32). (1) Mercies despised, privileges scorned, pledges made to God in covenant and broken, become the foundation for towering iniquity. The best things perverted are the worst. (2) Nothing is more fatal to the Christian calling than alliances with the ungodly. He who makes the experiment of such entangling alliances will speedily discover that his power is lost; that what he builds with one hand he pulls down with the other; that he does not win the world to God: the world wins him. It is a notorious fact that alliances with the wicked do not command the respect of the very men for whose favour they are formed. The world scorns those who sacrifice their religious principles to worldly policy or social ambitions. III. THE PUNISHMENT OF THEIR APOSTASY. 1. No two ideas are more inseparably linked together than these two of sin and suffering. The one follows the other by a law as fixed and imperative as the agony of a burning hand. They are the "twin serpents" of the race, inseparable companions. 2. But all suffering is not penal. With respect to God's people it is remedial and corrective. Moses Browne truly saith, "A great deal of rust requires a rough file." IV. GOD'S MERCIFUL PROVISION FOR ISRAEL'S DELIVERANCE. God answered the cries of distress by sending them Judges—men chosen and qualified to act as His vicegerents in the emergencies of the nation. Let no Christian despair or be discouraged even in the most adverse circumstances. Evermore it is true that "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." (*W. G. Moorehead, D.D.*) **There arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord.**—*Israel forsaking God*:—With ages of schooling, and always the same lessons, mankind is slow to learn the absolute and unalterable conditions of prosperity; equally slow to note and steer clear of the reefs and shoals on which nationality after nationality has gone to wreck. I. THE DRIFT OF HUMAN NATURE. It is towards sin, and away from God. The Israelites were men no better and no worse than other men. Sentimental philosophers of the modern type may write out in soft phrase their exalted estimates of human nature; they may enlarge upon its beauties and excellences; but, in spite of their fancies and ecstacies, here the fact asserts itself in the record, as it does on every page of history, that human nature, left to itself, gravitates downward. II. THE INFLUENCE OF MEN IN HIGH STATION. The significant fact is recorded that "the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua," &c. A great responsibility rests upon those who occupy prominent places in society or in the State—a responsibility that is not discharged by fidelity to the specific duties of

their position. There is that undefined, incalculable something of influence which is inseparable from their station, which they are to guard and direct. III. THE DANGER OF RELIGIOUS INSENSIBILITY. It is twofold. There is danger that men will come into a state of mind and heart where they will be unmoved by Divine truth, and there is great danger in that state. The children of Israel did not sweep over at once and in a body into idolatry. They drifted, by slow and unrecognised gradations, from the service of God to the worship of Baal and Ashtaroth. Carelessness about single duties, indifference to single truths—here were the causes of their final detection. The process has been often repeated, is still in progress. Men and women walk our streets to-day utterly indifferent to the most solemn truths of religion, to whom all the truths of God were once intensely real. There was a time when conscience was quick, and the least wandering from duty brought sorrow and repentance. There was a time when immortality, with its heaven of blessedness and its land of infinite sorrow, loomed colossal on the horizon of thought. There was such a time, but it has passed, perhaps for ever. Neglect of duty, lack of watchfulness against sin, disobedience to many a heavenly calling—things like these, slight and unnoticed in themselves, have swept them away from the moorings of faith and interest, and they are adrift on the dark sea of unbelief and indifference. IV. THE SECRET OF PROSPERITY. The Israelites had all the human factors of success—a fruitful country, a genial climate, experience in the arts of war and peace, and the prestige of a triumphant march from Egypt to Canaan. These were seemingly enough to make them a power among the nations. But one thing, the indispensable thing, was missing—the Divine favour which they had forfeited by their sin. Is God for us or against us? is the decisive question. If He frown, empires with the glow of centuries of art and culture transfiguring them may crumble to dishonoured dust, and the shame of their defeat become greater than the splendour of their conquests. From the tawny sands that cover the old-time magnificence of Babylon and Nineveh, and the scores of historic centres that have faded out of sight, comes one and the same declaration, voiced by the desert wind that moans over their graves, "Even so shall it be with the nations that forget God." And what is true of men in the mass is true of individuals. The conditions of real and enduring success in life are always the same. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Many things are rightly estimated as elements in what is called a successful life. Enterprise, thrift, patience, energy—all these are helpful and desirable forces; but it still remains unalterably and everlastingly true that the sovereign maxim of political and social economy is that given long ago by Jesus on the mount: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God," &c. (*Sermons by the Monday Club.*)

Vers. 11–15. **They forsook the Lord God of their fathers.**—*Israel's obstinacy and God's patience*:—This passage sums up the Book of Judges, and also the history of Israel for over four hundred years. Like the overture of an oratorio, it sounds the main themes of the story which follows. That story has four chapters, repeated with dreary monotony over and over again. They are: Relapse into idolatry, retribution, respite and deliverance, and brief return to God. The last of these phases soon passes into fresh relapse, and then the old round is gone all over again, as regularly as the white and red lights and the darkness come round in a revolving lighthouse lantern, or the figures in a circulating decimal fraction. 1. The first is the continual tendency to relapse into idolatry. The fact itself, and the frank prominence given to it in the Old Testament, are both remarkable. As to the latter, certainly, if the Old Testament histories have the same origin as the chronicles of other nations, they present most anomalous features. Where do we find any other people whose annals contain nothing that can minister to national vanity, and have for one of their chief themes the sins of the nation? As to the fact of the continual relapses into idolatry, nothing could be more natural than that the recently received and but imperfectly assimilated revelation of the one God, with its stringent requirements of purity and its severe prohibition of idols, should easily slip off these rude and merely outward worshippers. Instead of thinking of the Israelites as monsters of ingratitude and backsliding, we come near the truth, and make a better use of the history, when we see in it a mirror which shows us our own image. The strong earthward pull is ever acting on us, and, unless God hold us up, we too shall slide downwards. Idolatry and worldliness are persistent; for they are natural. Firm adherence to God is less common, because it goes against the strong forces, within and without,

which bind us to earth. Apparently the relapses into idolatry did not imply the entire abandonment of the worship of Jehovah, but the worship of Baalim and Ashtaroth along with it. Such illegitimate mixing up of deities was accordant with the very essence of polytheism, and repugnant to that of the true worship of God. These continual relapses have an important bearing on the question of the origin of the "Jewish conception of God." They are intelligible only if we take the old-fashioned explanation, that its origin was a Divine revelation, given to a rude people. They are unintelligible if we take the new-fashioned explanation that the monotheism of Israel was the product of natural evolution, or was anything but a treasure put by God into their hands, which they did not appreciate, and would willingly have thrown away. 2. Note the swift-following retribution: "The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel." That phrase is no sign of a lower conception of God than the gospel brings. Wrath is an integral part of love, when the lover is perfect righteousness and the loved are sinful. The most terrible anger is the anger of perfect gentleness, as expressed in that solemn paradox of the apostle of love, when he speaks of "the wrath of the Lamb." God was angry with Israel because He loved them, and desired their love, for their own good. The rate of Israel's conquest was determined by Israel's faithful adherence to God. That is a standing law. Victory for us in all the good fight of life depends on our cleaving to Him, and forsaking all other. The Divine motive, if we may so say, in leaving the unsubdued nations in the land, was to provide the means of proving Israel. Would it not have been better, since Israel was so weak, to secure for it an untempted period? Surely it is a strange way of helping a man who has stumbled, to make provisions that future occasions of stumbling shall lie on his path. But so the perfect wisdom which is perfect love ever ordains. There shall be no unnatural greenhouse shelter provided for weak plants. The liability to fall imposes the necessity of trial, but the trial does not impose the necessity of falling. The devil tempts, because he hopes that we shall fall. God tries, in order that we may stand, and that our feet may be strengthened by the trial. 3. Respite and deliverance are described in verses 16 and 18. The R.V. has wisely substituted a simple "and" for "nevertheless" at the beginning of verse 16. The latter word implies that the raising up of the judges was a reversal of what had gone before; "and" implies that it was a continuation. And its use here carries the lesson that God's judgment and deliverance come from the same source, and are harmonious parts of one educational process. Nor is this thought negatived by the statement in verse 18 that "it repented the Lord." That strong metaphorical ascription to Him of human emotion simply implies that His action, which of necessity is the expression of His will, was changed. The will of the moment before had been to punish; the will of the next moment was to deliver, because their "groaning" showed that the punishment had done its work. But the two wills were one in ultimate purpose, and the two sets of acts were equally and harmoniously parts of one design. The surgeon is carrying out one plan when he cuts deep into quivering flesh, and when he sews up the wounds which he himself has made. God's deliverances are linked to His chastisements by "and," not by "nevertheless." 4. A word only can be given to the last stage in the dreary round. It comes back to the first. The religion of the delivered people lasted as long as the judge's life. When he died, it died. There is intense bitterness in the remark to that effect in verse 19. Did God then die with the judge? Was it Samson, or Jehovah, that had delivered? (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

The anger of the Lord was hot against Israel.—*God's methods with nations*:—I. SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF NATIONAL SINS (vers. 11–13). There is an amazing tendency in communities to commit the same sins. We are such creatures of imitation that every community develops a certain individuality; all composing it, while having personal peculiarities, do yet have many modes of speech and thought and habits of life in common. Every nation, every city, has its characteristic virtues, its characteristic sins. It is easy to "follow a multitude to do evil." So the Jewish people developed a propensity to idolatry. But a still more striking fact regarding national sin is the way it is promoted by the influence of other nations. Israel followed the gods of the people that were round about them. II. THE RETRIBUTION OF NATIONS (vers. 14, 15). A nation must be punished in this life if at all, for it has no hereafter. Consequently, in national experience the connection between sin and the loss of prosperity is most distinctly seen. III. THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD MEN AS LEADERS (vers. 16–18). It is God's method to elevate and save nations by the influence of men whom He brings forward for the purpose. They may hold very different positions in public life, they may be men of very different character

and abilities, but we are to recognise the work they do as made possible through the goodness of God. We must trust God more in national emergencies, and pay more heed to the counsels of men who are appointed of God to be our leaders. It is worth our notice here that the judges of Israel were simply the vicegerents of God. God was the Chief Magistrate of the nation. He claimed absolute authority. The government was a theocracy; that is, God enacted the laws of the nation, interpreted them, and enforced them. He combined in Himself the three departments of government—the legislative, the judicial, and the executive. Our governments are under equal obligation with the judges of old to bring God's thought before the people and to enforce His will. Our rulers show themselves to be raised up of God, and are delivering us from the misery of our national sins only as they act for God and express His will in their government of the people. IV. THE AMAZING TENDENCY OF NATIONS TO RELAPSE INTO SIN (ver. 19). It is a sad record, but true to nature and repeated in every age of the world. Reform makes progress, as the tide advances, by refluent waves, only each succeeding wave rolls a little higher up the beach. The wave sweeps in, but it does not stay there. It rolls back and leaves the shore bare, and everything seems swept out to sea. That is a very discouraging feature to the eager reformer. There is need for us of to-day, in view of this law of retrogression in progress, of two things. One is never to be discouraged by any seeming discomfiture. There are undoubtedly moral lapses in communities. In Cromwell's day, in England, there was a great advance in morals and high purpose, but with the death of Cromwell and the accession of Charles II. the wave of progress flowed back again and left the unhappy kingdom demoralised and given over to folly. But this was only a temporary reverse. In time the right re-asserted itself, morality triumphed, and the nation rose to a higher level than ever before. We may be sure this is God's design for us. V. THE PROBATION AND DISCIPLINE OF NATIONS BY TRIAL (vers. 20–23). Just as David was fitted for kingship by the rude discipline of his life as an outlaw, so was Israel fitted to introduce Christ to the world by its bitter experiences in the time of the judges, in the days of the captivity, and under the hated Roman yoke. God is doing the same thing for this nation, training it for great usefulness, or at least giving it opportunity to be so trained, by its successive trials. (*A. P. Foster.*)

Vers. 16–23. **The Lord raised up judges.**—*The judges, their choice, function, and administration:*—I. These men, in some of whom the miraculous operations of the Holy Spirit were singularly manifested, were not chosen, like the suffetes of Carthage, with regal powers for a year; nor like the archons of Athens, with divided and carefully defined responsibilities; nor like the dictators of Rome, chosen to exercise uncontrolled power during extraordinary emergencies. They were not chosen by the people at all. They were sent forth by the Divine King of Israel—impelled by an inward inspiration, which was in several instances confirmed by outward miraculous signs to act in His great name. They were raised up as the exigencies of the times required; and their presence and their absence were alike calculated to keep alive in the nation a sense of dependence upon its invisible King. II. The functions which the judges were called upon to discharge may be partly understood by referring to the position in which Moses and Joshua stood in relation to the twelve tribes. The judges were God's vicegerents. The parallel between the office of the judges and that of Moses or Joshua was not, however, complete. In so far as they were specially raised up to be God's vicegerents in Israel, it holds good; yet it was a separate and distinct form of government, and is recognised as such by St. Paul. Moses and Joshua was called, each of them, to introduce a new order of things. But during the period of the judges, nothing, in respect of God's covenant, was put upon a new footing. The history of the people is a succession of various fortunes, afflictions, and deliverances, alternating according to their public sin or their repentance: but no change occurred, permanently or deeply affecting their public condition. As often as the sins of the people brought down God's chastisements, and chastisement produced repentance, judges were raised up to repel the invader, and to restore peace and tranquillity. Hence they are frequently called, in the sacred history, "deliverers and saviours." The judges were the chief magistrates of the Hebrew commonwealth. As such, they had to deal with religious, no less than with civil, affairs; for the sharp line of separation between these which modern ingenuity has invented did not then exist. It became the duty of the judges to stir up the people to return to the Lord; and hence they needed to be themselves men of faith. III. With regard to the effect of their

administration upon the nation of the Jews, I think the period of the judges was, upon the whole, a period of national advancement. For, in the first place, the rule of the judges secured long periods of public tranquillity. Gloomy and fearful as are some of the details furnished in the Book of Judges, the Hebrew nation was nevertheless in a better state during that period, morally, politically, and spiritually, than it became afterwards during the reigns of the later kings. Not only the intervals of repose, but also the periods of warfare, must be taken into account in estimating the benefits of their rule. In general, they exerted themselves to prevent idolatry, dissuading the people from their besetting sin; but there were times when the people "would not hearken unto their judges"; and further, "when the judge was dead," they took advantage of the interregnum which sometimes occurred, and "returned and corrupted themselves more than their fathers." These apostasies were followed by chastisements. The Lord forsook them; He permitted their enemies to oppress and torment them; "the east wind from the wilderness" dried up the fountain of their strength, until, at the point to die, they bethought themselves of His holy name. Miserable and forsaken, their name might have been blotted out for ever but for the "saviours"—figures of a greater Saviour—whom their God raised up to deliver them. Nor was success denied to these men in that which they undertook. The kings of Mesopotamia, of Moab, and of Canaan, the fierce mountaineers of Ammon: the innumerable hordes of the Bedouin; the lordly and persistent Philistines, were in turn humbled and subdued by these men who, through faith, "quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." (*L. H. Wiseman, M.A.*)

CHAPTER III.

VERS. 1–5. The nations which the Lord left, to prove Israel by them.—*The trial and chastisement of an unfaithful people*:—I. IT WAS GOD'S OWN THOUGHT TO PUT THEM TO THE PROOF. 1. Far otherwise were the thoughts of the nations. (1) When Israel was strong their thoughts were of alliances. (2) When Israel became weak their thoughts were of conquest and revenge. 2. The nations could do nothing without God's permission. 3. This proving of character was done out of respect to His covenant. (1) God acted by principle and not by temporary impulse. (2) He acted according to His established manner of dealing with His people's sins. (3) Provision made for this through the intervention of the coming Messiah, the real Mediator of the covenant. 4. God puts His people under discipline to serve wise and holy ends. (1) Nor real injury is ever intended. (2) Never is the rod without some gracious instruction: "Hear ye the rod, and Him who appointeth it." 5. God Himself determines the time, manner, and severity of the trial. II. IT WAS NECESSARY TO PUT ISRAEL TO THE PROOF. 1. Their allegiance to their God must be ascertained. (1) God's jealousy required it. (2) Without allegiance the people were not in a fit state to receive Divine blessings. (3) Ways and means were easy where there was allegiance. 2. Human protestations of obedience are little to be trusted. III. THIS TESTING OF CHARACTER WAS MADE IN LOVE, NOT IN ANGER. 1. All God's dealings with His covenant people are necessarily in love. This is the very spirit of His covenant: "Your God"—"God is for you"—always on your side. 2. It was love to prevent a breach of the covenant. 3. It was love to teach the heart the bitterness of sin. 4. It is love to teach self-knowledge and humility. 5. It is love where a false character exists to have the discovery of it made known in good time. IV. OBEDIENCE IS WITH GOD THE ALL-IMPORTANT REQUIREMENT. 1. Obedience is the index which shows that the heart is right with God. 2. Obedience springs naturally from the fear and the love of God. 3. In the gospel obedience must spring from love. 4. Obedience in the gospel is the obedience of children. 5. Obedience must be shown in the face of opposition. (*J. P. Millar.*) *Tests and chastisement*:—I. THE WORK TO BE DONE. 1. Chastisement as well as trial. 2. A special mark is put on the reason for this course of dealing (chap. ii. 20–23). II. GOD'S CHOICE OF INSTRUMENTS. 1. God designates His own agency to do His work. 2. God selects His instruments from the camp of His enemies equally with His friends. 3. A sinning people often supply the means of their own correction. 4. God can turn the most unlikely persons into fit instruments for doing His work.

III. THE TENDENCY OF THE COVENANT PEOPLE TO APOSTATISE FROM THEIR GOD. 1. It is what might have been least expected. 2. The root-cause lies in the depravity of the human heart. 3. Remissness of parental training one of the immediate causes. IV. EACH NEW GENERATION REQUIRES IN SOME DEGREE TO BE TAUGHT BY AN EXPERIENCE OF ITS OWN. 1. The strange incapacity of the human heart for receiving Divine lessons. 2. Personal experience is the most effective method of teaching. (1) A more vivid impression is made. (2) Personal interests are more deeply touched. 3. Each generation must have a character of its own, and answer for itself. (*Ibid.*) **To teach them war.**—It was God's will, then—it was a necessity for the Israelites—that they should "learn war." In their case "learning war" meant learning that God alone could fight for them. Do not the Canaanites of unbelief, heresy, and worldliness still remain? And is not the evil of their remaining presence overruled for a twofold good—that of teaching His Church how to make war, and of proving their faithfulness toward Himself? (*L. H. Wiseman, M.A.*)

Vers. 6, 7. **Served their Gods . . . forgat the Lord, and served Baalim and the groves.**—*The downward course of sin:*—I. THE FORM OF THEIR SIN. One of omission (chap. ii. 2). 1. No sin of omission is ever small. (1) It slights God's authority. (2) It implies alienation of heart from God. (3) There is no fear of God before the eyes. 2. Sins of omission may become indefinitely great. II. THE TENDENCY OF SIN TO MULTIPLY ITSELF. 1. No sin stands alone. 2. The root-sin here was failure to exterminate the Canaanites. 3. It led to their dwelling among the idolators. 4. Their intermarrying with the ungodly. 5. Their worship of false gods. 6. The facility with which they made the change. III. THE DEPLORABLE END TO WHICH THEIR EVIL COURSE LED. 1. There was entire abandonment of God as their God. Sin is a great—(1) Spoiler; (2) madness. 2. There was sinking down to the level of heathen worship and heathen practices. (*J. P. Millar.*)

Ver. 8. **Sold them into the hand of Chushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia.**—*Israel in servitude:*—1. This was the first servitude of the Israelites ever since they came out of their house of bondage in Egypt; for now such detestable apostasy was found in Israel as heaven and earth had caused to be ashamed of (Jer. ii. 12, 13); therefore is he made a slave and servant (ver. 14). They that would not serve the Lord in the abundance of all things with gladness shall serve their enemies in the want of all things with sadness (Deut. xxviii. 47, 48); therefore God forsook them, that they might know the worth of His service by the want of it under woful miseries (2 Chron. xii. 8). 2. As this was the first oppression that Israel met with after their coming out of Egypt, so this king of Syria was their oppressor. This king had God's commission to oppress Israel, for God sold them into this king's hands, and yet was he but a lessee; his possession was by virtue of a lease, and that only a lease limited to eight years. It surely seemed very long for those "children of light" to walk in such a place of darkness for eight years together; if so, the time of their suffering bears a due proportion to the time of their sinning. 3. The marvellous proportion God observed in proportioning Israel's suffering to the proportion of their sinning. As Israel's sinning increased in magnitude so their suffering increased in multitude, every term of their slavery rising higher and higher. They served this Chushan eight years, and, because not bettered thereby, they served Eglon eighteen years (ver. 14) and afterwards Jabin twenty years (chap. iv. 3, &c.). With the froward God will deal frowardly (Psa. xviii. 26). When lesser corrections could not restrain them from sin, God laid heavier punishments upon them, and punishes them seven times more; yea, and seven times more, and yet seven times more to that, as He had threatened (Lev. xxvi. 18, 21, 24, 28). God will not give over punishing until men give over sinning. 4. The redeemer that the Lord raised up to redeem Israel out of their first slavery was Othniel (ver. 9), which God would not yet do for them until they humbled themselves, when God, they saw, would get the better of them. And this deliverer, whom God sent to redeem Israel, when sold into the hands of this terrible tyrant, was a type of our Redeemer the Lord Jesus, who was sent of God to redeem us, and thus all the other judges be types of Christ, though some more eminently than others. Here the Spirit of the Lord came upon Othniel, gave him prudence, prowess, and magnanimity to make war against this tyrannical oppressor, and having vanquished him in battle, he restored rest to God's Israel, governing his

people in peace and in the profession and practice of God's true religion according to His law. (*C. Ness.*)

Vers. 9–11. **Othniel the son of Kenaz . . . and the Spirit of the Lord came upon him.**—*The controlling man* :—It is the personal soul that is the basis of all action. Your machinery is soulless, and the true driver, after all, is the man with his hand on the throttle. You invent, and you multiply motions, and actions, and skilled operations; but you never can dispense with the brain and mind and heart of the controlling man. In the same way, all movements on this earth need to head up into personal souls. God sets a man in charge of the machinery, and as the stars and suns revolve in their cycles, as the events of the human race happen and are run off the reel, they get their explanation only from the personal souls that have been in the movements. When the time of the Reformation was at hand, Luther shakes himself in yonder cell and comes forth. When the thick mists of Popish darkness were to be rolled away from Scotland, John Knox appeared. It is the same all down the ages: men, personal souls, are called forth to lead events to their God-destination and God-purpose. Events need men. So with God! When the time came, God found the Person who would undertake this great purpose of redeeming love, who would atone for man, and suffer on the Cross. (*John Robertson.*) *Othniel* :—Othniel, the first of the judges, seems one of the best. He is not a man of mere rude strength and dashing enterprise; nor is he one who runs the risk of sudden elevation of power, which few can stand. A person of acknowledged honour and sagacity, he sees the problem of the time and does his best to solve it. He is almost unique in this, that he appears without offence, without shame. And his judgeship is honourable to Israel. It points to a higher level of thought and greater seriousness among the tribes than in the century when Jephthah and Samson were the acknowledged heroes. The nation had not lost its reverence for the great names and hopes of the Exodus when it obeyed Othniel and followed him to battle. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*) *Political leadership* :—In modern times there would seem to be scarcely any understanding of the fact that no man can do real service as a political leader unless he is a fearer of God, one who loves righteousness more than country, and serves the Eternal before any constituency. Sometimes a nation low enough in morality has been so far awake to its need and danger as to give the helm, at least for a time, to a servant of truth and righteousness and to follow where he leads. But more commonly is it the case that political leaders are chosen anywhere rather than from the ranks of the spiritually earnest. It is oratorical dash now, and now the cleverness of the intriguer, or the power of rank and wealth, that catches popular favour and exalts a man in the State. Members of parliament, cabinet ministers, high officials need have no devoutness, no spiritual seriousness or insight. A nation generally seeks no such character in its legislators, and is often content with less than decent morality. Is it then any wonder that politics are arid and governments a series of errors? We need men who have the true idea of liberty and will set nations nominally Christian on the way of fulfilling their mission to the world. When the people want a spiritual leader he will appear; when they are ready to follow one of high and pure temper he will arise and show the way. But the plain truth is that our chiefs in the State, in society and business must be the men who represent the general opinion, the general aim. While we are in the main a worldly people, the best guides, those of spiritual mind, will never be allowed to carry their plans. And so we come back to the main lesson of the whole history, that only as each citizen is thoughtful of God and of duty, redeemed from selfishness and the world, can there be a true commonwealth, honourable government, beneficent civilisation. (*Ibid.*) *Prayer helpful to leadership* :—You may be as unlike a warrior, as unlike one of the Lord Jesus Christ's Ironsides as unlike can be, yet you have a great deal to do with the making and shaping and sending of them. Can you feel the woes of Israel? Can you shed tears over her? Have you a large, sympathetic heart? And, summing it all up in one word, can you cry? can you pray? "When the children of Israel cried unto the Lord," the Lord sent this mighty Othniel, upon whom the Spirit of the Lord came. Ah! I think we are weak there. We would have more great preachers, we would have more revival movements, in the large meaning of the word revival—not only the ingathering of sinners, but the up-building and brightening of saints—if we had more people who sigh and cry for the sad condition of God's inheritance. "Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence." Tossing often on a bed of sickness, or weakness, or pain, do you sigh and cry?

Then will God be getting ready His Othniels, and Ehuds, and Shamgars. (*John McNeill.*) *The gift of "the Spirit of the Lord":*—This clearly teaches us that all gifts of the Spirit, and all excellent effects thereof, they are none of ours—they are the Lord's; He giveth and distributeth them at His pleasure, as we see here that it was the Spirit of the Lord that came upon Othniel, whereby he brought to pass the great things that he did. And whatsoever is of any note in man for price and excellency it is all of God, and cometh from His mere bounty. Alas! there is no bird stripped of her feathers more bare and naked than man in himself is void of goodness; for what hath he that he hath not received? Insomuch as all that he hath to glory of is his sin—a most holy and approved truth, which giveth God His due, and layeth out man in his colours, that he is nothing else, if he rob not God of His honour, and prank not up himself in his gifts, he is nothing else but naked, poor, and a mirror of misery. (*R. Rogers.*) *Judgment, then deliverance:*—Judgment and then deliverance; judgment of the mistakes and sins men have committed, thereby bringing themselves into trouble; conviction of sin and righteousness; thereafter guidance and help that their feet may be set on a rock and their goings established—this is the right sequence. That God should help the proud, the self-sufficient out of their troubles in order that they may go on in pride and vain glory, or that He should save the vicious from the consequences of their vice and leave them to persist in their iniquity, would be no Divine work. The new mind and the right spirit must be put in men, they must bear their condemnation, lay it to heart and repent, there must be a revival of holy purpose and aspiration first. Then the oppressors will be driven from the land, the weight of trouble lifted from the soul. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*) *The making of a hero:*—This is a book of heroes, of strong men, and strong women too, who, in a time of storm and stress, saved their own souls and the souls of those around them also. It will brace you up, invigorate, and inspire you. It is said of Pitt that he breathed his own lofty spirit into his country. "No man," said a soldier of the time, "ever entered Mr. Pitt's room who did not feel himself a braver man when he came out than when he went in." And no man can read this book sympathetically without being moved to emulation of the mighty souls that move across its pages. It tells us very briefly, but suggestively, the story of twelve people who helped to make Israel, and of these the first, and in some respects the best also, is Othniel, the son of Kenaz. Many of these "saviours," as they are called, were far from being perfect characters. But in Othniel's life, as we have it, there is no hint of anything that offends either the taste or the conscience. His name means God's Lion; and throughout he seems to have been a brave, pure, noble man. And yet the age in which he lived was a very corrupt one. His surroundings were very unfavourable to the growth of character. There was no king or leader in Israel—every man did that which was right in his own eyes. Idolatry and licentiousness abounded. And the task set before you, young men and women, is not so very unlike that which faced Othniel. You must first save yourselves—you must, by God's help, save your own souls. You must also help God to save the world. This is your task and your privilege—both to be saved and to be saviours. But how did Othniel become a hero and a saviour of his people? I. "Caleb said 'He that smiteth Kiriath-sepher and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife.' And Othniel the son of Kenaz took it." That is the first fact given us from Othniel's life, and that is all that is said about it—Othniel took it—took the stronghold of the mighty sons of Anak—the oracle city of idolatry before which even Caleb quailed. Othniel took it. But many things go to the making of such a deed as that. 1. First, of course, comes courage. It was an undertaking full of desperate difficulties. What was needed was not so much physical as moral courage. The courage to follow is common enough; it is the courage to lead that is rare. Othniel had this soul-quality. He led the way and took the city. Well, if you young people are bent upon saving yourselves from the evil that is in the world, you too must have and must exercise this soul-courage. It often needs more courage to handle the yard-wand than the sword—to be a business-man than to be a soldier. Daily life, all hum-drum as it looks, has its Marathons, its Waterloos, and its Almas; its Six Hundreds that ride into the jaws of death. 2. But courage, what is it? How does any one get courage? Well, if we take another look at Othniel we shall see that the lion in him was not born on the day Debir was taken. It was already strong, matured, full grown. Born long before this in the desert, it had been nourished by daily deeds of unrewarded valour. Acts such as this take years to grow. All his life he had been unconsciously preparing for this. Yes,

that is the story of all courage. God gives it to us as He gives all things in seed form. Every heart is full of germs—courage-germs among them. If we cultivate any germ it grows and bears fruit; if we neglect it it dies. If you want courage you must grow it from a seed—that is you must practise the little you have. 3. Once more: This deed of Othniel's lays bare to us the central secret of all true power—faith. You are familiar with great facts of which Othniel never even dreamt. But your salvation does not depend on how many beliefs you carry about with you, but on how much do you believe any of them. Any truth becomes a saving truth to the soul that trusts it and through it trusts God. Thus this little sentence, unpromising as it looks, gives us three things that go to the making of a hero: courage, habit, faith, and the greatest of these is faith. II. "And he (Caleb) gave him Achsah his daughter to wife: and it came to pass when she came unto him that she moved him to ask of her father a field." This, the second of the three facts of Othniel's history, introduces us into a very different set of circumstances, a different climate of life in fact. 1. Debir is taken; Caleb has kept his word; the bride is coming to her new home. Applause is not much for a young pair to live on; so, amid the excitement and the joy, this fair daughter of the wilderness kept her eyes open and her wits about her. She noted the situation in which her new home lay. It was south land. It had no water. She moved her husband to ask for the field that had the springs of water. But Othniel is better at fighting than asking. Her humour, her sense, and her exquisite tact carried all before them. Caleb gave her "the upper springs and the nether springs." 2. But what has this to do with the making of a hero? Much in every way. Othniel was brave enough but he had a great deal to learn. He had taken Debir with his sword, but here at his own door he is confronted with a situation in which his sword is useless. Evidently he must learn the use of other weapons. He must master the art of gracious speech. He must acquire tact. There are knots which it avails not to cut, they must be patiently untied by skilful fingers. He is to help in making a people who shall never become formidable as a military power—never produce an Alexander or a Cæsar—who shall ultimately lose all their swords, lose every inch of their territory and every stone of their citadels, and yet shall overcome their enemies through sheer force of character. That he may do this God sent him to the home-school and the farm-school to learn those homely virtues of common sense, patience, and tact, without which strength and courage were of little avail. 3. Well, you too, young people, must not despise these. III. "The children of Israel did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord . . . the children of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim eight years . . . the children of Israel cried unto the Lord." Many years—forty, perhaps, or even more—have passed since Othniel and Achsah took possession of their new home, and we are confronted with a new and painful situation. The Lord's people "forgat the Lord and served the Baalim"—that was their sin! "They served Cushan, King of Mesopotamia"—that was their punishment! Egypt and Pharaoh were not so far away as they thought. Egypt, the land of bondage, is wherever sin is, and Pharaoh follows iniquity as the night the day. "And the Lord raised up a saviour . . . even Othniel, and the Spirit of the Lord came upon him." He raised him to this glorious height of manhood by breathing into him His own breath of love and life. There were many reasons why Othniel should do nothing. The chief, perhaps, was that apparently he could do nothing. Perhaps Achsah was another—and the farm a third. Yes, depend upon it there were many voices both within and without that bade Othniel beware of meddling with things beyond his power. But the still small voice called. He put himself, all that he was, all that he had, upon the altar, "and he judged Israel." He called the erring people back to truth and duty. Led by God's spirit he began there, with the people's own sin first. Then he "went out to war . . . and his hand prevailed against Cushan, and the land had rest forty years." Thus Othniel, even Othniel, became a saviour of his people, and the lion-like man of war, under the influence of God's spirit, was changed into a living prophecy of the Lamb of God, the Saviour of the world. "And Othniel, the son of Kenaz, died," having in a rude, hard age, nobly sustained the character of the Happy Warrior The phase "Othniel—a saviour," is at once his epitaph and his eulogy. Well, even so are noble lives still made. Faith, patience, wisdom, and the breath of God are the great life-building powers. Saviourhood is the end of all the ways of God in a soul. He makes some men strong in order that they may help the weak. He gives wisdom to some that they may thereby guide the foolish. He makes men holy in order that they may turn the unholy from the error of their way. Now, young people, will you be made

strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might? Around you, in numbers that Othniel never dreamed of, are men that "serve the Baalim and serve Cushan," that sin, and suffer for their sin in mind, body, and estate. Will you help to save these? (*J. M. Gibbon.*)

Vers. 12–30. **The Lord strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel.**—*Sin—suffering; penitence and deliverance repeated*:—I. NEW SIN ADDED: "Again." 1. A painful surprise. 2. Deeper guilt. It showed more deliberation in the act of rebellion, more stubborness of will, and greater defiance of the Divine authority. It also implied the heavy guilt of despising all the argument involved in the close and faithful dealing God had with them, in the terrible chastisements He had already brought down on their heads. 3. A perplexing problem to solve. Why should the children of such holy men as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob become such incorrigible rebels? This is the puzzle that meets us everywhere in the history of God's Israel. (1) The people had lost their leader. (2) Apostasy was due in part to the universal bad example. (3) Idolatry was their easily besetting sin. (4) A new generation had sprung up. (5) The inveterate depravity of the human heart. II. NEW CHASTISEMENT INFLICTED. 1. The Lord chastises in faithfulness. 2. He makes use of a new rod. 3. He sends a more severe token of His displeasure. We do not know, indeed, that the oppression of the Moabites was heavier than that of the Mesopotamian hordes. Probably there was not much to choose between them. But it was certainly much longer continued. Now it is eighteen years of servitude, whereas formerly it was but eight years. In this respect, the scourge was much more severe, not only because the lash was longer applied, but also because God showed that His ear was more heavy to hear their prayer. It was also a deeper humiliation to be trodden upon by a people whom till now they had despised, from their birth onwards, and who had been accustomed for more than three generations to tremble at the name, and the mention of the God of Israel. 4. He helps His enemies against His own people. III. NEW EXPRESSIONS OF PENITENCE. 1. In distress they flee to the universal refuge. 2. They had a special plea with God as children of the covenant. 3. Their temporary apostasy did not shut them out from the privilege of prayer. (1) They had a mediator to plead for them in their priesthood, and the continual sacrifices were laid on the altar, as the means of propitiating. (2) Their apostasy was not allowed by their covenant God to become permanent. IV. NEW DELIVERANCES EXPERIENCED. 1. This deliverance came in answer to prayer. 2. It was brought about by a suitable instrument. (*J. P. Millar.*) **Ehud the son of Gera.**—*The summer parlour*:—I. A MAN UNDER GREAT PHYSICAL DISADVANTAGES MAY ACCOMPLISH WONDERS. Ehud was left-handed; and the original implies some serious defect in the right hand. So it has often been. Among poets, the three greatest of all times were totally blind, viz.: Homer, Ossian, and Milton. Among sculptors: Gambassio could not see the marble or the chisel. Among authors: Pope, the poet, was a wretched invalid. Among preachers: Robert Hall, Richard Baxter, Edward Payson, Samuel Rutherford, and Dr. McAll were all invalids. These men in the battle of life fought with the right hand tied behind them; but they had something better, viz., the spirit of consecration to a righteous and noble life. II. EHUD TEACHES US TO MAKE THOROUGH WORK OF WHAT BELONGS TO OUR DELIVERANCE FROM SIN. Some are content to cut down sins which may be ranked as kings, princes, and captains: but Ehud slew the common soldiers as well. It is to work as thorough that each of us is called. This is no easy work. But heaven is not to be reached by easy-going people. III. GOD MAKES READY IN SOME SENSE EVERY INSTRUMENT OF DEATH, AND IS THE SOVEREIGN DISPOSER OF ALL EVENTS. There are three kingdoms—of Nature, of Providence, and of Grace. Of each and all Jehovah is King. In the kingdom of Providence, some of the instruments of death are common sickness, epidemics, accidents in erecting houses, accidents at sea, accidents on the rail-train. These are no accidents! God has perfect right to slay a man either by malaria or by the instrumentality of man. He alone has the keys of the grave. IV. NOBODY STEPS OUT OF LIFE AS HE EXPECTS. It was so with the king of Moab. Death to him was a great surprise. There was but a step between him and death; but he knew it not. "The unexpected is the probable!" The manner in which we step out of life is pre-eminently unlooked for. If so, we press an inference: Prepare! Be ready! The accepted time is now! (*W. F. Bishop.*) **I have a message from God unto thee.**—*A message from God*:—I. Before proceeding to the delivery of this message, I would insist upon THE FACT HERE STATED—namely, that I come to you, as a messenger "from God."

One chief reason why mankind hear with so much indifference and with so little effect upon themselves, is simply that they fail to recognise that he who thus speaks to them does come from God. Suppose, however, that yonder heaven should open, and that down through the "everlasting gates" and along the fields of air should come an angel burning with celestial glory and should stand suddenly in your midst. Would not your minds be instantly raised to a fixed and reverent attention? Would you not almost seem to hear in the tones and words of the heavenly messenger the very voice of the Mighty One by whom he was sent? But I claim that I as truly come "from God." II. We pass on then, to THE DELIVERY OF THIS MESSAGE. It is a message from God; there is no place for argument. It is a message to a soul in imminent danger of destruction; there is no room for the play of imagination. 1. Man of the world, absorbed in the occupations of this present life, whatever those occupations may be, "I have a message from God unto thee." "Riches and honours," He declares, "come of Me alone." "Riches," He affirms, "certainly take to themselves wings, they fly away as an eagle toward heaven." "Riches," He warns you, "profit not in the day of wrath." God declares to you, that if you allow mammon to have a higher place in your hearts than Himself and His service, you must expect nothing else but that He will strip you of all your gains when perhaps you least expect it, and render all your labour of none effect. He reminds you that you "can take nothing out" of this world. And He bids me remind you that after death there is a judgment. 2. Young man and young woman just entering life, "I have a message from God unto thee." God bids me tell you that you have in your possession a priceless treasure which He has committed to you to be used for His glory, and for which He will hold you hereafter to a strict account. You are in the possession of sensibilities not yet dead to the influence of His grace. He has afforded you a perfect knowledge of His will, and He has, moreover, brought to bear upon your hearts the power of His Spirit. He tells you that you may squander and lose all the advantages which you now possess, but He warns you of the result. 3. Lukewarm Christian, "I have a message from God unto thee." God bids me tell you, in few words, just what your religion means, and what it is worth. You profess with your lips to serve God, while you plot in your heart how you may serve God and the world. But God tells you that while you imagine you are deceiving Him, He sees through the duplicity, the meanness of your conduct. 4. Daring and impenitent man, you who can violate God's law without a feeling of alarm or remorse, "I have a message from God unto thee." You have travelled far. If ever you repent now, to the saving of your soul, it must be by a severe and terrible struggle. You have trifled with God's mercy, but His justice has abated not one tittle of severity. God, however, sends me once more, to tell you that if you will even now put forth all your strength to break the cords wherewith sin has bound you, He will still vouchsafe to assist and bless you in your endeavours. But if you are deaf to this message, if you will still go on in impenitence and sin if you refuse to be reconciled to Him, He informs you that He "reserveth wrath to His enemies." (*W. Rudder, D.D.*)

The gospel message:—I. THE TIDINGS I bring to-day are very different from those which Ehud carried to the King of Moab, and my design in delivering them is very opposite to his. He came, evidently, with an hostile intention, and concealed, under his garment, a deadly weapon. The message he brought was a message of vengeance, and though artfully disguised, was to prove fatal to the King of Moab. But the message I bring is a message of peace and goodwill to men, and my intention in delivering it is the most kind and friendly. 1. In the first place, let me beseech you to awake from that slumber and insensibility in which, perhaps, you have too long remained. If you were hanging upon the brink of a precipice, would you not haste away to some place of safety? 2. A second message which I have from God to you is, to intreat you to be reconciled to Him. Will you persist in your enmity to God when He is willing to become your friend? 3. A third message I have got from God to you is to beseech you to kiss the Son; that is, honour, love, and obey the Son lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way. It was the great object of our blessed Lord's ministry to recommend Himself to the affections of men, and to persuade them to come to Him. 4. A fourth message I have from God to you is, that you be prepared to meet Him. 5. A fifth message which I have got from God to you is, that you set your hearts and your house in order, for you must die and not live. II. I go on to urge you to comply with the gospel message, by a few MOTIVES AND ARGUMENTS. 1. Reflect first on the authority of the Person who sends the message. 2. A second

argument to persuade you to comply with the gospel message, is the vast importance of it. It is not of a trifling nature, like a piece of idle news, to which you may listen or not as you please. It is the most interesting which was ever published to mankind. What is the history of all the arts and sciences, when compared with the life and doctrine, with the sufferings and death, with the resurrection and glory of the Son of God? Are they not mere childish tales? And shall we prefer what tends to amuse and entertain us, to what contributes to enlighten and to save us? 3. A third argument to engage you to comply with the gospel message is the encouraging and precious promises contained in it. It is suited to our guilt and depravity as sinners, and to our weakness and imperfection as creatures. 4. One argument more to engage you to comply with the gospel message is, that your ruin is certain and inevitable if you do it not. Perhaps the message I have now delivered you may be the last you ever shall receive; and is not this a strong argument for complying with it? (*D. Johnston, D.D.*) *I have a message from God unto thee:*—And perhaps you are ready to say, If we were certain you had, we should hang upon your lips with the utmost attention. Have you, indeed, had any immediate communication from heaven concerning us? No. Have you any new revelation to deliver to us? No: and yet, "I have a message from God unto you": that message is in this book—this book that many of you neglect and despise. "I have a message from God unto you." You are all equally interested in it. I. To THE YOUNG. It may be you start astonished that I begin with you. You fancy I should begin with the aged who are just stepping into the grave. But how do you know they are nearer death than you? II. I HAVE A MESSAGE FROM GOD UNTO YOU WHO ARE IN THE MERIDIAN OF LIFE. You who are engaged in its active business—ye merchants, ye tradesmen, I have a message from God unto you: "Be careful for nothing," &c. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God," &c. "What shall it profit a man, if he should gain," &c. III. I HAVE A MESSAGE TO THE OLD AND GREY-HEADED: "The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness." Is that honour yours? "Though you walk through the valley," &c. But are you an aged sinner, a hoary-headed trifler, scoffing at eternity, with one foot in the grave? Alas! alas! I have a message from God unto you: "The Judge standeth at the door." "Behold, I come quickly," &c. IV. I HAVE A MESSAGE FROM GOD UNTO THE RICH. I have a message of warning: "Charge those that are rich in this world," &c. It is a message of caution: "How hardly shall they that have riches," &c. It is a message of admonition. What says the wise man, "Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not?" "Riches make to themselves wings," &c. Are riches the right soil for piety? No—but the most formidable obstruction to its growth. V. I HAVE A MESSAGE TO THE POOR. Are you poor and pious? Then yours is the kingdom of heaven. "The poor have the gospel preached unto them." The promises of Scripture are principally applicable to the poor. VI. ARE ANY OF YOU SCEPTICAL? I have a message from God unto you. Are you sincere? Do you really wish to ascertain the truth? I have a message from God unto you: "If any man will do His will," &c., that is the man who shall ascertain the truth, and be emancipated by its freedom. But it is not the man who comes to speculate—who comes to gratify an idle curiosity—who comes cherishing the love of sin; that is not the man who shall know the truth. VII. IS YOUR MIND DEISTICAL? You want more evidence to prove that this holy book is the Word of God. Do you want mathematical demonstration? It were madness to ask it upon a moral subject. What evidence do you want? Is it evidence of testimony? You have it; and, I venture to say, there is more evidence of the Scriptures than of any other history on the face of the earth. What evidence do you want? Is it the evidence of prophecy? You have it. The Jews, at the present day, are a living and a mighty argument in proof of the truth of the Scriptures. What evidence do you want? Is it the evidence of miracles? That evidence was given in the first ages of Christianity, in order to establish the Divine authority of the Christian system, and, having accomplished it, it is done away; for if miracles had continued to the present hour, they would have ceased to operate in the way of miracles. There is sufficient evidence to justify the ways of God to men in your condemnation, if, after all this evidence, you reject Him. VIII. Do I SPEAK TO ANY WHO ARE DESPONDING AND PENITENTIAL? What a sudden change! what a delightful contrast! "I have a message from God unto you." "Come, and let us reason together," &c. (*T. Raffles, D.D.*) *The gospel message:*—I. THE MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL ARE GOD'S MESSENGERS. II. THE MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL MUST BE FAITHFUL IN DELIVERING THEIR MESSAGE. III. IF MEN REFUSE TO ATTEND TO THE MESSAGE THUS DELIVERED TO THEM, IT IS AT THEIR OWN

PERIL. IV. A MORE DIRECT APPLICATION OF THE TEXT: "I have a message from God unto thee." 1. To the careless, thoughtless person. 2. To the ungodly and the profane. 3. To the humble and serious inquirer after Divine truth (Heb. x. 38; Rev. ii. 5). 4. To those who, having once known the way of righteousness, are turned from the holy commandment delivered unto them. 5. To him whose heart now labours under a sense of sin; who, being brought to see his guilt and danger, is full of fear, and trembles for the consequences. How shall he escape the sentence of His righteous law? What shall he do to be saved? "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ," &c. 6. To the established Christian; the man who, having fled to Christ for refuge, from the guilt and power of sin, has found peace and joy in believing; and being now professedly devoted to the Lord's service, is living in hope of the glory that shall be revealed. "Be faithful unto death," &c. "Be not weary of well-doing." "Grow in grace," and "Let thy profiting appear unto all men." (*E. Cooper, M.A.*) *God's messages:*—I. GOD'S MESSAGES ARE OF DIFFERENT KINDS. 1. Reconciliation. 2. Repentance. 3. Faith. 4. Life and salvation. 5. Gospel privileges. 6. Special tokens of Divine favour. 7. Deliverances. 8. Warning and threatening. 9. Calls to duty. 10. Commands. 11. Encouragement. 12. Doom. II. EVERY MAN HAS DIVINE MESSAGES SENT TO HIM PERSONALLY. In the gospel, in the ordinary providence of God, and in the workings of his own conscience. 1. God individualises every man. 2. The wise thing for every man is to act as if he were the only person dealt with. 3. The messages are framed so as to have always an individual application. III. GOD'S MESSAGES ARE ALWAYS TO BE REVERENTLY RECEIVED. IV. IT IS DANGEROUS TO TURN A DEAF EAR TO GOD'S MESSAGES. V. MESSAGES OF GOOD TO THE RIGHTEOUS AND OF EVIL TO THE WICKED OFTEN COME TOGETHER. VI. GOD SENDS MESSAGES OF MERCY BEFORE HE SENDS MESSAGES OF JUDGMENT. VII. IT IS OUR DUTY AND OUR WISDOM TO BE ALWAYS READY TO RECEIVE THE LORD'S MESSAGES. Most men are not ready when the message comes (Luke xvii. 27–30, xii. 20, xvi. 19, with 23; Matt. xxv. 5; 1 Thes. v. 3; 1 Kings xxii. 26, 27, with 34–37; Prov. xiv. 32; Matt. vii. 13; 2 Sam. xviii. 9). Some are ready (Luke ii. 29, 30; 2 Tim. iv. 6–8; Acts vii. 59, 60; Heb. xi. 13–16; 2 Cor. v. 2, 9; 2 Sam. xv. 26; Ch. xxiii. 5; 1 Sam. iii. 18). (*J. P. Millar.*) *A distinct message:*—Can there be any person to whom God has never sent a message? Is He your Creator? And has He made you to drift on the tempestuous sea of life in solitude without compass or guide? I. MESSAGES FROM GOD. This Bible is in the house of every Englishman. It is "a message from God unto thee." Other messengers you have had. Ought not the kindness and compassion extended to you in providence to have led you to say, "How can I grieve such a God?" Other messages have come to you draped in black. Can you forget the season when life trembled in the scale, and the physician knew not which way it would turn? Another dark messenger has come to you. Death has bereaved you of friends and comrades. Are there those whom thou didst ensnare who have gone their way before thee to feel their terrible remorse? Let the remembrance of them make you pause and think and turn from your sins to the living and true God. II. THE GOSPEL OF THE GRACE OF GOD IS IN ITSELF A MESSAGE FROM GOD TO YOU. Be sure of this, let our case be what it may, the gospel preached is a message from God to our souls. The hypocrite cannot long attend upon the means of grace without finding that its doctrines are very heart-searching. They pierce his thoughts; they hold a candle up to him, and if he would but look they would expose his desperate condition. The formalists, the men who delight in ceremonies, cannot long frequent God's hallowed courts, where His true ministers proclaim His name, without perceiving that there is a message from God to them. The most careless spirit will find in the Word a looking-glass held up to his face in which he can see a reflection of himself. III. If there be such a message as this from God to us, HOW SHOULD WE TREAT IT? (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The Christian minister bearing a message from God to man:*—I. THE BEARERS OF THE MESSAGE. II. THE NATURE OF THE MESSAGE. Ehud. III. THE DANGER OF NEGLECTING THIS MESSAGE. (*H. S. Plumptre, M.A.*) *A message from God:*—I. IT IS A MESSAGE OF TRUTH. II. IT IS A MESSAGE OF LOVE. III. IT IS A MESSAGE OF PEACE. IV. IT IS A MESSAGE OF RECONCILIATION. V. IT IS NEEDED BY THEE. This alone is the message humanity needs; it alone meets the breadth and depth and multitude of its necessities. The light of nature is Cimmerian darkness. It reveals your danger, but reveals no means of rescue. VI. IT IS SUITED TO THEE. 1. It is suited to your ignorance, "making wise unto salvation." 2. It is suited to man's sin, expiating its guilt by the blood of the Cross. 3. It is suited to man's misery. VII. IT IS SUFFICIENT FOR THEE.

No want is there in our being which it cannot fill—no multitude it cannot minister to. VIII. IT IS SENT TO THEE. (*J. Cumming, D.D.*) *A message from God:*—Think, first of all, of the feelings with which we should expect such a message to be received. For, consider the scene from which that message comes: from God's throne on high. And consider the Presence from which that message emanates—even from our Creator, our Preserver, in whose presence we may at any moment be called to stand. And think next of the effects which we should expect the delivery of such a message to produce—profound attention, deep gratitude, perfect obedience. "A message from God!" Is such a thing possible? Has there ever come to earth, and to us men, a message from God? Surely. The whole world is full of voices of God. The night wears away—the grey light comes stealing on. And the sweet dawn of early day says, "I have a message from God unto thee." To the sick—"I have a message to thee." "There shall be neither sorrow, nor crying . . . neither shall there be any more pain." To the mourner—"I have a message to thee." "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." To the secret sinner—"I have a message from God unto thee." "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." The day goes on—a clock strikes. "I have a message from God unto thee," it says: "to thee, O careless one. The sands are fast running out—take heed how you waste time." Men are at work in the fields. Suddenly there comes a booming sound, borne towards them on the breezes, "Hark! that's the passing bell." "I have a message from God"—"It is appointed unto men once to die; and after this, the judgment!" (*J. B. C. Murphy, B.A.*) *Application of the truth:*—D. L. Moody was first awakened to an interest in spiritual things while sitting drowsily in Dr. Kirk's church in Boston, by some one suddenly rousing him and telling him that the sermon "meant him." **Ehud . . . took the dagger . . . and thrust it into his belly.**—*Ehud: left-handedness:*—According to the Septuagint, Ehud was an ambidexter; that is, a man who could use both hands with equal facility. Hector boasted—"Many a Greek hath bled by me, and I can shift my shield from right to left." Of the children of Benjamin we read (chap. xx. 16). Plato recommended all soldiers to acquire equal facility in the use of both hands. It is evident from all this, as well as from what is known amongst ourselves, that left-handedness has always been considered peculiar, otherwise it would not have been pointed out as a feature in any case. We never say of a man that he is right-handed, but we do remark upon any man whom we see using his left hand for purposes which are usually assigned to the right. I. MANY MEN MAY BE DEPENDENT UPON ONE MAN. 1. The one man may be in a better position than the many, and this may account for his influence. Take the case of a besieged city: one man outside the walls may work out the deliverance of the whole, &c. 2. The one man may be able to move about more quickly than the many. Crowds cannot be hurried to any wise action. They soon lose themselves in confusion. They need leadership to give unity and precision to their movements. 3. Specially is one good man more than all the hosts of evil. For the sake of the one God preserves the many. II. THE INSTRUMENTS CHOSEN OF GOD MAY OFTEN SURPRISE AND DISAPPOINT MEN. God sent a left-handed man to deliver Israel! It seemed like a mockery. In view of this apparent eccentricity of the Divine method we should remember—1. A man is not a great man merely because he is left-handed. Bunyan was a tinker, but it does not follow that every tinker is a Bunyan. George Whitefield was cross-eyed, but it does not follow that squinting is a condition of good preaching. 2. No man should be condemned merely because he does not take hold of things in the common way. Give every man an opportunity of proving himself. III. SOME GOOD USE MAY BE MADE OF THE MOST UNLIKELY QUALIFICATIONS. Many are secretly lamenting some peculiarity of temperament, some defect of body, or some circumstance which seems to shut them off from the general band of workers. Let such persons look at the text and take heart again! (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Lessons from the death of Eglon:*—I. THE POWER OF LEFT-HANDED MEN. There are some men who, by physical organisation, have as much strength in their left hand as in their right hand; but there is something in this text which implies that Ehud had some defect in his right hand which compelled him to use the left. Oh, the power of left-handed men! Genius is often self-observant, careful of itself, not given to much toil, bringing increase to its own aggrandisement, while many a man with no natural endowments, actually defective in physical and mental organisation, has an earnestness for the right, a patient industry, an all-consuming perseverance, which

achieves marvels for the kingdom of Christ. Though left-handed, as Ehud, they can strike down a sin as great and imperial as Eglon. But I don't suppose that Ehud, the first time he took a sling in his left hand, could throw a stone a hair's breadth and not miss. I suppose it was practice that gave him the wonderful dexterity. Go forth to your spheres of duty, and be not discouraged if in your first attempts you miss the mark. There was an oculist performing a very difficult operation on the human eye. A young doctor stood by and said, "How easily you do that—it don't seem to cause you any trouble at all." "Ah," said the old oculist, "it is very easy now, but I spoiled a hat full of eyes to learn that." Be not surprised if it takes some practice before we can help men to moral eyesight, and bring them to a vision of the Cross. Left-handed men, to the work! Take the gospel for a sling, and faith and repentance for the smooth stone from the brook. Take sure aim, God directs the weapon, and great Goliaths will tumble before you. II. THE DANGER OF WORLDLY ELEVATIONS. This Eglon was what the world called a great man. There were hundreds of people who would have considered it the greatest honour of their life just to have him speak to them; yet, although he is so high up in worldly position, he is not beyond the reach of Ehud's dagger. I see a great many people trying to climb up in social position, having an idea that there is a safe place somewhere far above, not knowing that the mountain of fame has a top like Mont Blanc, covered with perpetual snow. Oh, be content with just such a position as God has placed you in. It may not be said of us, "He was a great general," or "He was an honoured chieftain," or "He was mighty in worldly attainments"; but this thing may be said of you and me, "He was a good citizen, a faithful Christian, a friend of Jesus." And that in the last day will be the highest of all eulogiums. III. DEATH COMES TO THE SUMMER-HOUSE. Eglon did not expect to die in that fine place. Amid all the flower-leaves that drifted like summer snow into the window; in the tinkle and dash of the fountains; in the sound of a thousand leaves fluttering on one tree-branch; in the cool breeze that came up to shake feverish troubles out of the king's locks—there was nothing that spake of death, but there he died! In the winter, when the snow is a shroud, and when the wind is a dirge, it is easy to think of our mortality. And yet my text teaches that death does sometimes come to the summer-house. He is blind, and cannot see the leaves. He is deaf, and cannot hear the fountains. Gather about us what we will of comfort and luxury, when the pale messenger comes he does not stop to look at the architecture of the house before he comes in; nor, entering, does he wait to examine the pictures we have gathered on the wall. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *Unexpected perils*:—1. I daresay you think it was a rash thing of Eglon to receive Ehud in private, when he knew very well that the man who asked to see him was one of a people that hated him and longed to be rid of his oppression. And what is more extraordinary in his rashness is that he suffers Ehud to come to him with that great dagger a cubit long on his thigh. It is true that Ehud had a cloak, but I do not think it could altogether have concealed the weapon. I believe the reason why Eglon was easy in mind was this, Ehud had got his dagger slung on the wrong side. He left the fact of Ehud being left-handed entirely out of his calculation, and that was his ruin. 2. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." We have enemies, temptations without and within, to watch against. It is just when, and where, and how you least expect danger, that a fall may come. Take care! be sober! be vigilant! (*S. Baring-Gould, M.A.*) *Effective preachers compared to Ehud*:—When you see a man with a gift in his right hand, and his dagger concealed where only his left hand could get at it, that man is worth the watching. There is no preacher in the world worth his salt who is not like that. Like Ehud, have the right hand filled with the gift, with the gospel offer and present, if you like, but for God's sake, and for the sake of everything, hit hard with the left! Preaching that does any good is typified in Ehud. The gift, and the gift in the best hand, and the gift put first; but look out for the left, look out for the blow. It is not to be all coddling, and wheedling, and coaxing, and pleading, "Oh!" and "Ah!" and "Won't you come?" There must be the law, the terror, the close-quarters, the words that are daggers, and the daggers driven home, and that unexpectedly. For that is another element in Ehud. Ehud is what we may call a man who does his work in his own way, and therefore he abounds in what I may call "surprise." In the Church, in all our pulpits, in all our active operations for God at home and abroad, would that we had more of the surprise; more unexpected things happening. More men who can work the left hand when the right hand gets tired. And when God sends a surprise-man to us,

don't you turn round and find fault with that man. Encourage him; cheer him on. He doesn't do as you do—he does, it may be, the other way; don't find fault with his methods. The test of all preaching styles is, do they hit? Do they go home? Do they minimise man and magnify God? Then they are all right. (*John McNeill.*) **They took a key.**—*A sermon upon keys:*—There are many different kinds of keys in the world, but I think we might select one or two of them, and try if we can make them keys of wisdom, to open our understandings. We shall, then, begin with a small but a very important key, namely—I. THE WATCH-KEY. The heart of the watch is the mainspring. The watch will not go unless the mainspring is right. II. THE "SAFE" KEY. Two burglars have been trying hard for hours to break into a merchant's safe. At last they give it up as hopeless and make their escape. In due time the merchant opens his shop, and takes a small key out of his pocket, and in less than a minute, and as if by magic, the heavy iron doors swing open. Then he takes out the gold, silver, and other valuables that he only can reach. The Bible is the "safe" of the Christian. Many people look at it, but only a few possess the key and are able to get at the treasures. Some people are so foolish as to deny that there are treasures in the Word of God because they cannot find them. III. THE HOUSE KEY. To be presented with the key of a house signifies to have liberty to go in and out of that house. Christ speaks of a house of which He is the door (John x. 9). Faith is the key to open it, for He again tells us that (John iii. 19). All who are in Christ are safe from the many dangers that ruin the souls of men. Within the fold there is pasture for the sheep. So in Christ there is refreshing and satisfying pasture. Nothing else can satisfy us. (*John Mitchell.*)

Ver. 31. **Shamgar the son of Anath.** — *Shamgar:*—This is one of the most singular and astonishing battles in the history of the world. If Shamgar had been stationed in some Thermopylæ, where the foe could only come one or two at a time it would not have been so wonderful; but he was in the open field, literally surrounded by six hundred desperadoes, bent on plunder and death. It gives us some idea of what pluck can do for a man when fired with the love of home and country. To my mind, there is something wonderful, almost miraculous, in this strange battle and unparalleled victory. I wonder, first of all, how he could muster courage to face so many, and how he escaped when surrounded by such a multitude. I wonder also, that when the Philistines saw that they were being slaughtered at every blow, and that they had no power to injure their mysterious antagonist, that they fought on and stood their ground until the last man was slain. It only shows that men may have courage in fighting on the side of evil without a particle of truth or righteousness to inspire them; that they will sacrifie their lives on the altar of a bad cause as well as a good one. I. MEN DETERMINE THEIR FUTURE BY THE MANNER IN WHICH THEY MEET THE DUTIES AND PROVOCATIONS OF THE PRESENT. God never selects a lazy, idle man, when He is going to choose a person to do some noble work. He promotes none but busy men. Shamgar was ploughing when the Philistines came upon him. It speaks well for him that he had heart to plough at such a time, for the whole country was thrown into great fear and discouragement. Few men, I am inclined to think, had courage enough just then to plough. Such men are an inspiration and a blessing to any community. So far as we can ascertain, Shamgar was an humble labouring man. Yet his heroic conduct on this occasion brought him into notice, and raised him to be one of the judges of Israel. The world is looking for men who can bring things to pass. Noble deeds are the stairway leading to greatness and honour. If you would be trusted, first learn to be honest: if you would rule, first learn how to obey; if you would rise to a more important position, fill the place where you are to overflowing with yourself, and God will soon beckon you to a wider sphere. II. IN THE ABSENCE OF SUCCESS, IT IS POOR LOGIC TO THROW THE BLAME ON OUR INSTRUMENTS OR SURROUNDINGS. The workman is more than his tools. The spirit and skill of the worker tower above his surroundings, and give value and significance to the instruments he wields. Shamgar fought this battle with an ox goad. However discouraging your circumstances, if you give yourself fully to God, and walk in the full honours of uprightness before Him, the great Captain of our salvation will not only give you blessed foretastes of the "rest that remaineth for the people of God," but He will also enable you to cut your way to victory through all the spiritual Philistines that may confront you, even though your instruments may be as insignificant as those of Shamgar. III. IN OUR LIFE WORK WE SHOULD BE NATURAL, AND USE THE INSTRUMENTS WE KNOW

BEST HOW TO HANDLE. Shamgar fought with the ox-goad. He knew so well how to handle it that, at close range, it was a terrible weapon to come in contact with. He could kill more men with it in a crowd than with sword or musket. He knew the spring and feel of it so perfectly that every stroke brought two or three Philistines to the ground. What we want in order to our greatest possible efficiency is, not somebody else's way of doing things, but our own, trained and sanctified by the grace of God. No two persons are exactly alike; and so there are phases of work which each individual is constitutionally fitted to do which no other person can ever do quite as well. IV. NEW INSTRUMENTALITIES SHOULD NOT BE CONDEMNED SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY ARE NEW AND OUT OF THE REGULAR ORDER, BUT SHOULD BE JUDGED AND VALUED ACCORDING TO THEIR RESULTS. As a weapon of destruction the ox goad was unknown up to this time; but, judged of by its results, it was worthy of high appreciation. It may be that, in the past, the Church has been a little too conservative in the matter of new agency; that she has been too much inclined to condemn any agency that was not officially sanctioned or technically approved. There is nothing that carries conviction like the logic of facts, and nothing succeeds like success. Think of one man against six hundred, with nothing in his hands but an ox goad. You may not be as well qualified for the work as some others; but still God has a work for you to do, and He will help you to do it if you do your best and trust Him. It may be that your sphere is humble and obscure, but you can live a noble life and do grand work in obscurity. Some of the greatest evangelists of our own day teach us two lessons—1. That sanctified individuality is the condition of usefulness and the great want of the times. 2. That the vast majority of Christians have talent enough to become each a mighty power, in the hands of God, to hasten the millennial glory of the future. (*T. Kelly.*) *A man for the time:*—From this let all true patriots take heart—with the hour and the peril comes the man required. I. THE APPARENT INCOMPATIBILITY AND INSUFFICIENCY OF THE DELIVERER AND HIS WEAPON. A herdman carrying a goad, an ugly implement some eight or ten feet long, and shod with iron. Uncouth, without such military training as the science of the times could give, destitute of such arms as the Philistines would be likely to fear. He could only be looked upon as an improvised leader with an extemporised armament. Opposed to him was a host led by hereditary chieftains. Now, as ever, the Philistine opponents of Christ and the truth grin inanely at the rabble rout, as they deem the Lord's host to be. They sneer at the Word, albeit they bear many scars inflicted by that old Damascene blade. They laugh at the praying, the preaching, and the labour of the "unlearned and ignorant men" whom the Lord has called to do His work. II. THE TRIUMPHANT EFFICACY OF BOTH. Shamgar's generalship, strong arm, awful ox-goad, proved to be no laughing matters. The soul of a patriot, the genius of a leader, the skill of a strategist, were all in him. Neither devil, lords, nor army had much time to sneer when Shamgar reached them. They had mistaken the man, the instrument, and the God behind all. History repeats and spiritualises itself. For, we ask, in what is the augury, whence is the success of our Christian warfare, waged against the enemies of God and man? In numbers, literary efficiency, dialectical skill, scientific theology? Not so; Satan can beat us out of the field in every one of these. He is constantly doing it. Not all the drum-beating, banner-waving, and shouting of our conferences and demonstrations ever frighten him. But his doom is sealed when a Christ-filled Shamgar leads. That man who on his knees pleads and waits to know, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"—such are the men we want, the men we should pray for, the men we ought to be. The fact that we are Christians should be a certificate that we are surrendered, Christ-filled men, or our profession is a lie. Would that all were so. Oh, that all may become so! Whatever the sacrifice involved, there is no more happy life, and, at its close, can be no more glorious epitaph than "he saved Israel!" (*James Dann.*) *Shamgar: mean instruments:*—1. How absurd it is for any man to blame his tools for bad work. Shamgar used an ox-goad; Samson wielded the jawbone of an ass; David had but a sling and stone. Sometimes we think what wonders we could do if we had better instruments. 2. How important it is that men should use those instruments which they can handle most skilfully. Shamgar knew how to use the ox-goad, and David knew how to use the sling and stone. 3. How foolish it would be to ridicule the instruments when the results are so obviously good. Look at the six hundred dead men! Look at the slain giant! Look at the prostrate walls of Jericho! The rule applies to every department of life. It applies to preaching. It applies to foreign missions. It applies to every Christian effort. 4. How victories are sometimes won in the

face of the greatest improbabilities. One man against six hundred! Some men would have succumbed under the mere pressure of numbers, but Shamgar fought the crowd. Do not let us blame men for working with instruments that have not been officially or technically approved. The one great object is to do good. What meaner instrument can there be than the Cross? (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Shamgar's ox-goad:*—Shamgar considered not whether he was equipped for attacking Philistines, but turned on them from the plough, his blood leaping in him with swift indignation. The instrument of his assault was not made for the use to which it was put: the power lay in the arm that wielded the goad and the fearless will of the man who struck for his own birthright, freedom—for Israel's birthright, to be the servant of no other race. Undoubtedly it is well that in any efforts made for the Church or for society men should consider how they are to act, and should furnish themselves in the best manner for the work that is to be done. No outfit of knowledge, skill, experience, is to be despised. A man does not serve the world better in ignorance than in learning, in bluntness than in refinement. But the serious danger for such an age as our own is that strength may be frittered away and zeal expended in the mere preparation of weapons, in the mere exercise before the war begins. The important points at issue are apt to be lost sight of, and the vital distinctions on which the whole battle turns to fade away in an atmosphere of compromise. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*) *Shamgar's ox-goad:*—The ox-goad was not much; but Shamgar with the ox-goad, that was the sight to see. Perhaps you cannot work the ox-goad. It fitted Shamgar, and he fitted it; but, after all, it was the man. It is the man. I read Wesley's sermons—those sermons that routed the Philistines of a hundred years ago, and delivered Israel over all this England; I read those sermons of Wesley and Whitefield, and, I say, what is in them? You would be tired of them from me. Why? You see the obvious answer. You look at that ox-goad and say, "There is not much in that"; neither is there. It was the man, and God in the man. One was taken to see a famous sword that had belonged to a famous swordsman, and when he saw it he said, "I do not see much in that sword," and there came the obvious answer, "No, but you should have seen the arm that wielded it." Shamgar's hand grew into the hilt of that ox-goad, and it became part of him. The ox-goad and Shamgar, again, became part of the arm of the Lord God Almighty. That was all in it, and that may be in you and me, God taking our individuality and consecrating it and using it for His eternal glory. Now, be yourself, whether you be at the plough or at the desk; God can do His work with the ox-goad; He can do it with the pen; He can do it with anything if it lies near His hand. And, last of all, what honourable mention this ploughman gets: "He also delivered Israel." Why, the mighty Joshua did no more! (*John McNeill.*) *Great results with imperfect tools:*—Many of the discoveries in astronomy, chemistry, mathematics, navigation, and science generally, were made with very imperfect instruments. Dr. Valentine Mott's remarkable surgical skill is the more honourable because of his comparatively poor instruments. True genius shows itself in accomplishing grand results with imperfect tools. Rittenhouse, whose name is a synonym for marvellous scientific attainments, worked in boyhood on his father's farm, and calculated eclipses on plough-handles and fences; and, although studying alone, made himself master of Newton's "Principia," and discovered for himself the method of fluxions when in his nineteenth year. It is little wonder that when he observed the transit of Venus (June 3, 1769), while in his private observatory at Norriton, he fainted from excitement at the moment of apparent contact. Benjamin West, the Anglo-American painter, made his first colours from leaves and berries, and his first brushes were taken from a cat's tail. Thus self-taught, at the age of sixteen he practised portrait-painting in the villages near Philadelphia, his first historical picture being "The Death of Socrates." Humphry Davy had but little opportunity to acquire scientific knowledge, but he made old pans, kettles, and bottles contribute to his success as he experimented in the attic of the apothecary shop in which he was employed. Over a stable in London lived Michael Faraday, a poor boy who made a living by carrying newspapers to customers. While apprenticed to a bookbinder and engaged in binding the "Encyclopædia Britannica," his eyes fell on the article on electricity. He had only a glass vial, an old pan, and a few other articles with which to make experiments. A friend took him to hear Sir Humphry Davy lecture on chemistry. Later the great Davy called on the humble Michael. The years pass, and Tyndall said of Faraday, "He is the greatest experimental philosopher the world has ever seen."

CHAPTER IV.

VERS. 1–3. Israel again did evil . . . the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin.—*Reappearance of vanquished foes* :—Their ancient foe, whom they had conquered, rose gradually from his prostration. He rebuilt his castle; he repossessed the lands; he multiplied his armies. At length he defied and "mightily oppressed" the chosen people. How has this history been re-enacted a thousand times in the experience both of individual believers and of Christian Churches! How many there are who answer to the description (1 Pet. ii. 20). The Canaanite was slain, but he reappears and resumes his ancient tyranny. Exploded errors revive. Slain heresies live again, and triumph on the very spot where they received what was deemed their death-blow. The subjugation and prostration of the Church may not be as complete as was the twenty years' slavery of Israel under the second Jabin, yet is not the fortress of Hazor being rebuilt in this land? Are not the furnaces of Harosheth being rekindled? And are not the Papal workmen busy fabricating chariots of iron wherewith anew to scour the plains which valiant Protestants of old won in the name of the Lord and of His truth? (*L. H. Wiseman, M.A.*)

Vers. 4–11. **Deborah, a prophetess, . . . judged Israel.**—*Deborah: woman's attribute* :—1. Amongst the women of the Bible Deborah stands out in great prominence, though we know but little of her character. She is one of those who show forth a distinctive characteristic of women—the power of contrivance and design carried out to such an extent as to make some doubt whether her acts were within the limits of religion and morality. 2. Deborah seems to have been a kind of oracle in the unsettled state of things that existed among the Jewish tribes; her advice was attended to and her voice followed by leaders and by armies with the most implicit devotion. Her parallels are many, both in Scripture and history. We are irresistibly reminded of one whose spirit once bore up the flagging energies of France in the annals of the latter, of Judith in those of the former. One circumstance strikes us as highly significant. Starting up close beside her was the kindred spirit of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite. Though not strictly answerable for the act of Jael, she nevertheless celebrated that act as one of her objects of gratulation in her magnificent hymn. 3. We must view her in two lights. She was of course under a heavenly inspiration, as well as under the guidance of a strong natural character. In the former capacity she is simply to be viewed as one of those instances in which God chooses to show forth His power through the weak things of this world, and to bring about great national crises through the instrumentality of the weaker sex. But placing this view of the subject aside, I will consider her in reference to her natural character and ordinary position, as a woman in the midst of vast and depressing circumstances rousing by the vigour, boldness, and freshness of her character, the flagging energies of men. We see this in many instances of life, public as well as private. How remarkable and almost miraculous it is that the wife, who shares the anxious cares of the husband, be he labourer or mechanic, is able to keep up her spirit and to hope to the end! How often would the man, who has had to contend with the waves of constant trouble, succumb to increasing difficulties; and how many a crisis of difficulty, in connection with illness, accidents, or the like, in the domestic circle, calls forth the presence of mind of the mother, when the father would shrink from the difficulty, and lend no hand to help. Nor is it only this power that is felt so beneficially in the cottage as well as in richer homes. The eye that sees a brighter day and that pierces the fast rolling clouds of present adversity, perceiving the glow of a brighter morning when "the tyranny will be overpast," is especially the eye of woman. One other attribute of woman which comes out in Deborah's story is the deep impression that her mission was Divine, and that the instincts of nature were the gifts of inspiration. There is that spirit in the weaker sex which, in the moment of high crisis and difficulty, would often justify the impression; but this spirit is the gift of God for a special purpose, and is a substitute for those bolder and more persevering qualities which belong to the stronger sex. There are many periods, both in private and in public life, which need rather light shed by a ready and present mind than the steady beam of the more enduring fire. From the lack of it we may miss the object of our life's search. It is the want felt in such conjunctures as these that woman supplies; she bears the lamp of the midnight; and sometimes when with weary watching other lamps have gone out, hers is trimmed. 4. Such is woman's prero-

gative, such her peculiar characteristic. For though Deborah may be an exaggeration in a remarkable crisis of the characteristics of her sex, they nevertheless exist in more or less force in every representative of it. It is seemingly paradoxical, but no less true, that women should have the power of meeting imminent danger with a calmness and perseverance often denied to man. Let them view these gifts as the direct ordering of Heaven, and, while they glory in them as their heritage, let them cultivate and improve them as the talents committed to their trust. (*E. Monro, M.A.*)

Lessons from an old story:—1. In an age and a season of perpetual unrest, how refreshing is it to the spirit to have before us the example, albeit in a remote past, of one judge who could dwell under the palm-tree between Rama and Bethel, and to whom the children of Israel could go up for judgment. If the right kind of men, a few of them, could be set free to think, to advise, to originate, to counsel, what a gain would this be to a people laden with care, full of intellectual and spiritual perplexities, and feeling themselves terribly alone in their difficult and embarrassing way. For lack of this many lives go utterly astray, and many minds are wrecked on shoals and sandbanks of doubting. It might be said that the two offices of action and thought are only kept distinct in the present state of things, and that those who want counsel have no lack of help from an innumerable crowd of writers. Unhappily the thinkers are too often too much isolated from action, so that they run into vain and profitless speculation, having neither help for this life nor hope in that which is to come. It is the combination which helps: the judge sitting under the palm-tree, but Israel coming up to him for judgment. The moral of it all is, busy men, snatch moments for reflection! let no day be quite without it! 2. We see the true place and dignity of woman here in the positive and in the negative. Deborah was a prophetess. God spoke to her. She saw within and beneath the appearance of things. She did not allow the visible to crush out the invisible. She was not appalled by the nine hundred chariots of iron. She knew that there was still a God in Israel who rules in the kingdom of men, and though He bears long with evil, and sometimes sets up over nations the basest of men, He can yet be called on by prayer, and in the long run will make it to be well with the righteous. In a great emergency she became an influence; she called Barak to her, set him his task, assured him of his commission, and even consented at his request to accompany him on his march. This was heroic, but it was also feminine. Deborah did not assume the command of the army; she was the influence, she was the inspiration, but she left the leadership and the generalship to another. Not for nothing have we the record of another woman on the same page with that of Deborah. We shrink instinctively from the bloodstained hand of Jael. She has overstepped the line between the feminine and the masculine—nay, between the enthusiast and the fanatic. The excitement of victory might draw forth the impassioned cry even from one of the male sex, even from one of God's utterers, "Blessed above women"; but that cry has never found even an echo in evangelical hearts; that cry has given trouble and pain to champions of revelation. We cannot receive it as the voice of God's Spirit, except in some modified and softened-down form, in which it hails, and justly hails, the victory as a victory of the cause of the monotheistic idea as against the polytheistic; as a victory of the cause of progress, of the cause of development, and therefore in some sense the cause of mankind and of the world. 3. One last thought occurs, and it might seem at first hearing to conflict with the foregoing; but it is not so. Deborah says to Barak, "Hath not the Lord God of Israel commanded?" And he replies to her—a woman—"If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go." She rejoined yet again, "I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the Lord shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." We are not concerned with the last phrase—"God shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." Scripture readers see the hand of God everywhere—go so far as to say, "Shall there be evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?" We ask what was the point, what was the characteristic, the differentia in the faith of Barak, that the Epistle to the Hebrews should single him out for mention? And we find it here in the self-forgetfulness of Barak in doing God's work. What if one woman set him on it, and another woman is to finish it? What if the journey he took was not to be for his own honour? Shall that stop him? What will the troops say if they see a woman marching by his side; see him consult her about his tactics; hear him confess that she is his monitress and his inspirer? Shall that thought deter him? No. He has God's cause in hand; God's honour, not his, is the thing to aim at. Here is faith forgetting itself in the cause. It is

a grand heroism; for lack of it much good work is spoilt and much forborne. There is a phrase which more often disguises than precludes the self-glorifying. Humble instruments all call themselves; yet the same modest disclaimer asserts the instrumentality. Propose to omit the name from the subscription list or the list of patrons, where will the humble instrument be then? "The journey which thou takest shall not be for thine honour." No, for one woman suggested it and another woman shall complete it. What then? Faith is willing to have it so; for faith is the sight of the invisible, and this arrangement will show the Invisible, the Doer. (*Dean Vaughan.*)

The duty of woman to women:—It is a suggestive and on the whole perhaps a creditable fact that heroic women are not so interesting to women as to men. We read about that German prophetess who roused her people against the invaders from Rome, or about Joan of Arc, who, simple peasant girl that she was, communing with mysterious angels' voices (as the legend runs), kindled the French nation against the English dominion when princes and statesmen had well-nigh given up the cause; or we read about Deborah, like St. Louis under the oak at Vincennes, sitting under a Judæan palm, not with downcast eyes and folded hands and extinguished hopes, but all on fire with faith and energy, with the soul of courage and the voice of command, and we are constrained to pay homage to her daring and her fearlessness, to her strong will and her unshrinking purpose. But if I were to ask any young girl whether she were ambitious of such a career, there is not one in a score who would say so. A woman's idea of happiness and usefulness ordinarily centres in a home. We have been accustomed to hear the constantly reiterated assertion that "woman's sphere is the home." I confess for one that in view of the actual facts of society, as they exist around us, there is often in such words a sound of cruel irony. Do not you and I know, that there are thousands of women to whom a home is as impossible a thing as a castle in Spain? Do we not know that there are thousands of young girls who have no human being but themselves to depend upon, and who must somehow make their way and earn their own bread in life? Will you tell me how a home or anything else than a room and a hard, stern struggle for life is possible to these? We have now reached a point in the social progress of this age when it is necessary that we should every one of us recognise the crisis that is upon us. A much larger number of women must hereafter support themselves than have ever done so before. There are some callings from which, as it seems to me, women must for ever remain shut out. Any calling which requires conspicuous publicity, masculine activities, and out-door leadership is not, I venture to submit, for a woman. For one, I should not care to see her hanging from a yard-arm, driving a steam-engine, digging in a coal-mine, or vociferating in congress. But when we have eliminated from the question those occupations from which healthy self-respect would restrain any really womanly woman, there remain a vast range of employments on which women have not yet entered, but for which, nevertheless, they have singular and supreme qualifications. Already women have acquired the science of telegraphy, and they are, of course, more expert in it than men can possibly be. Women are already training themselves to be phonographic reporters. And here again their peculiar aptitudes are a pre-eminent qualification. Why should they not oftener provide for them an honourable maintenance? It is a curious and scarcely known fact that in the middle ages, the daughters as well as the sons in a family often inherited and carried on the family art or handicraft. When one goes to Nuremberg, or Prague, or Heidelberg, he will find bits of wood carving, artistic work in metal or stone, which no modern hand can pretend to rival. How are we to explain this earlier perfection? Simply on this wise: the calling of the father was the calling of the children. Exquisite workmanship was a hereditary trait. "Among goldsmiths the daughters executed chasing, among furniture-makers carving, among stone-masons sculpture, among engravers drawing and graving." Could there be more pleasing or wholesome employment of one's best aptitudes? It is time that every woman among us, and especially every young girl with culture and influence and social power, should awaken to the needs of her own sex. What Deborah was under the palm-tree at Mount Ephraim every brave and true-hearted woman is called to be in the service of as holy a cause and as precious interests. We call Deborah a prophetess, and so she was. We regard her as somehow separated by her rare natural endowments and her exceptional inspiration from the other women of her time, and so she was. But in a very real and a very living and lofty sense every woman is a prophetess, with a prophet's gifts and a prophet's

calling. For what are prophets' gifts but that Divine insight, that swift and heaven-born intuition, which is your rarest gift, your loftiest endowment? Shall I be opening an old wound if I say that it was a woman's voice and pen that, more than any other, roused this land to the evils and the cruelties of slavery? and as truly I believe they must be women's voices that must waken us men to the cruelties of that other servitude in which too often and too widely the weak of your sex are to-day oppressed. Do not, then, be afraid to lift your voice in any good cause that aims to elevate women to equal chance and equal respect and equal emolument with men in the great struggle of life. Be, each one of you, a Deborah to cry to some slumberous and sluggish Barak, "Up and do the Master's work, in the spirit of the Master's example!" (*Bp. H. C. Potter.*) If thou wilt go with me, then I will go.—*Self-reliance:*—It was very natural that Barak should desire the presence of Deborah. She was a woman of natural influence, possessed of sagacity, able to read the signs of the times. As it has been said the best definition of a fool is a man who is wise too late, so the best definition of wisdom is wisdom at the right moment; and she possessed that wisdom, and understood what was the proper occasion when it was desirable to strike the blow for freedom. Her intellectual powers had made her influence great among the people; difficult cases were brought to her; her knowledge and her sagacity had won its way and established its influence in Israel. But it was not only natural; there was a certain appearance of piety in the profession. Deborah was not merely one of those persons whose gifts give them a high dominating influence over their fellow-beings, but she was believed by the people to be inspired by the breath of the Spirit of God. And, therefore, there was in their view a certain sanction of the Divine power which came, as it were, from her lips. Was it not, then, becanse he regarded her as the Divine representative that he said, "If thou wilt go with me I will go"? May we not argue further, and say precisely, because she was the one person in Israel at that time in whose words you could trace the meanings of the Divine Spirit, therefore was it not an attitude of the spirit of piety which would say, "I cannot undertake this expedition alone; I must be assured of the presence of the prophetess of the Lord"? Is there not piety in the resolution, "If thou wilt go with me, then I will go"? And yet, it is necessary for us to try and understand the motive before we declare whether it is good or bad. "If thou wilt come with me, then I will go." In what strain ought a man to face the obvious duties of life? Is it true that we are always to wait for the assistance of others, or are we bound to do what lies before us, regardless of the sympathy we may receive? The message sent by Deborah was an emphatic message, "Go there with ten thousand men, and I," says the voice of the Lord, "will draw thy adversaries to the river Kishon." There is not the slightest hint or any suggestion of condition; it is a plain, simple, and absolute order. The hour is come; the blow is to be struck; it is your duty to do it; here are your instructions. You know the class of persons who are never able to do any duty without the assistance of others; you know the schoolboy who always does his work when he can get his sister to stand beside him; you know the class of man who is always reluctant to quit with company and undertake any irksome duty by himself. He is not the character which impresses us as possessing strong, marked, or admirable lines. You want some one more determined and self-relying. If a duty has to be done, in the name of that duty, and in the name of your God who gives you that duty, do it like a man, and do not stop to make conditions which betray your weakness, and say, "If this condition be fulfilled, if I am assisted by the presence of another, then I think I can do my duty, but I do not think I can face the frowning face of duty alone." I say this is a character which does not possess the highest order of self-reliance. It is also an answer which betrays slackness and feebleness of life. By the very law by which Israel was then governed, by the law of that very religious sentiment which had been operating in the minds of the chosen people, one thought was predominant in all their minds, "The Lord is the God of Israel." It is the realisation of the Divine presence, and that alone, which marks the higher range of faith; the power to say, "I will go in His strength because He sends me, and I ask not Deborah to go with me to jeopardise her life; she has her work to do and I have mine to do, and the God who inspired her can make my hand strong." But what was the result? As a fact the victory was won; but you know how truly the scorn of Deborah burst forth when she received the conditions of Barak, "If thou wilt go with me." "Then let it be known that the laurels of this victory are not for thy brow. If thou hast thought that only with a woman at thy side thou canst face the crowning hour of

battle, those honours which you would boast are reserved for a woman. The Lord shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." Barak sinks down into the second place in the story, and the opportunity which might have been his was snatched from his hand, as in the hour when he was tested he betrayed weakness. What, then, should we gather from this? The enormous and measureless importance of self-reliance in every affair of life. Life is a constant movement from companionship into isolation. As I pass through the road of life I have to determine certain questions, and I must determine them by the law of my own existence and my own conscience as in the sight of God. Over and over again we are bound to have that experience. We think we have others to help us in certain matters, but the final decision rests with us. Does it not mean that in the purposes of God we are to be taught self-reliance? Sometimes we are told that Christianity is deficient in the virile virtues. That is only because we have misunderstood the story. What is the story of the Redeemer? Is it the story of one who relied so completely upon others that by a dexterous adjustment of His teaching to the wants of the day He was able so to establish His ascendancy over others as to be able to bring forward a community willing to be called by His name? That is the very reverse of the genesis of Christianity. (*Bp. Boyd Carpenter.*) *Influence* :— Every human being has influence, which is a part of himself, and helps to make up his personal being. And as long as he lives it goes out from him to others, for weal or for woe. Nay, more; it is not limited to time. Once having lived, it never dies. For the individual may go down to the tomb and perish; but his influence shall go on evermore. I. WE ARE ACCOUNTABLE FOR OUR INFLUENCE. This is evident from the very nature of influence. What is it? It is power; the power of one will over another. This power and authority go forth from us to others in various ways —in speech, by action, by the glance of the eye, by the expression of feeling, by the show of passion, by the play of the countenance, by the motion of the hand, by our dress, our habits, our style of living, and our conduct. And now I ask—if I cause a man to do an act, am I not responsible, *i.e.*, so far forth as I lead him to do it? Of course I am not to bear the entire burden of his conduct, for he is a man as well as I, and he is bound to think and judge for himself. But if I am the stronger, more controlling character, and use my influence to guide him astray, and start him on his way to ruin, surely I am responsible for what I do. But it is manifest that this principle is not one that is local, partial, or limited. It is a broad, general, universal principle; pertaining to souls under all circumstances. And see how it reaches our fellow-creatures on every side, with awful significance and tremendous power. I am responsible for my influence; I am held accountable by the Almighty for the way in which I affect and prompt the souls of my fellow-men. Then I am responsible for my influence upon you. Then you are responsible for your influence upon me; and each and every one of us is responsible for the influence we exert upon our neighbours. Then we are responsible for the channels by which our influence goes forth from us to others. And we are responsible for their outflowings; and though the influence of a man differs somewhat, in kind, from his specific acts, yet the law of Divine justice comes in here, with the same force and authority as in any outward deed. II. THE MEASURE OF OUR RESPONSIBILITY IS PROPORTIONED TO OUR INFLUENCE. Herein lies our stewardship. We are stewards of God in the particular item of influence. A little girl is beloved by her schoolmate; and so great power has she over her, that that schoolmate will do anything she wants her to do, good or bad. She is responsible for her control over that child's soul, and to God. They are both responsible for the power they possess, the one over the other. Here is a man in a community, of such commanding power, whether through wealth, talent, or character, that everybody quotes him as authority, and aims to follow in his track. As sure as God liveth, He will hold him responsible for his popularity and his power. III. INFLUENCE IS AN AWFUL, A PERILOUS THING WHEN IT ASSUMES THE FORM AND PROPORTIONS OF MASTERY AND CONTROL. And this is often the case. The mass of men, the world over, are governed by opinion and example. Imitation, too, is a most powerful agent in deciding the convictions and habits of men. No doubt it is God's will that certain prominent men should have authoritative influence; that is their calling; to that they are elected by the Almighty Himself, to the end that they may help to quicken inferior wills, and to decide human destinies. Thus in the family relation the words of a father or mother go with children to mature manhood, and may descend to children's children. How in our school-days our hearts have become knit "as with hooks of steel" to companions whom we have loved as Jonathan loved David, with a "love passing the

love of women." I have myself seen men moving about through a nation, after whom millions of men flowed as with the mighty current of a torrent; and when they spoke, momentous questions were settled, as though decisive utterances had come forth from an oracle or a god. But the illustrations of this controlling influence of men is as common in the lowlier spheres of life as in the higher. Sometimes a grand, noble parent serves his generation and blesses it, and then sends down the crystal purity of his honour and the odour of his sanctity to children's children. Sometimes it is the reverse, and the alcoholic blood and the alcoholic breath of a drunkard triumphs over the dominion of the grave, and reaches over a whole generation of men to his descendants, poisoning the atmosphere and polluting society by the sottishness of sons and grandsons. (*A. Crummell.*) **Is not the Lord gone out before thee?**—*A sermon for the new year*:—Wherever we may be called upon to go, our Lord has gone before us. I. WE ARE ENTERING INTO DARKNESS. God is light. What does it matter what we see, or whether we see at all, if He has seen and known that the way is safe? II. WE ARE ENTERING UPON UNCERTAINTY. But all things are fixed and ordered by God's power, and from knowledge. III. WE ARE ENTERING UPON DIFFICULTY. God is almighty in power. IV. WE ARE TO MEET WITH PAIN AND DEATH. God cannot die. Learn: 1. To distrust all human help and consolation. 2. To trust in Him who is so well able to do for us, and to be to us all we need. 3. To implicitly follow and confidently resign ourselves to His leadership. (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 18-24. **Jael went out to meet Sisera.**—*Life's crises*:—Emphatically are we reminded that life continually brings us to sudden moments in which we must act without time for careful reflection, the spirit of our past flashing out in some quick deed or word of fate. Sisera's past drove him in panic over the hills to Zaanaim. Jael's past came with her to the door of the tent; and the two as they looked at each other in that tragic moment were at one, without warning, in a crisis for which every thought and passion of years had made a way. Here the self-pampering of a vain man had its issue. Here the woman, undisciplined, impetuous, catching sight of the means to do a deed, moves to the fatal stroke like one possessed. It is the sort of thing we often call madness, and yet such insanity is but the expression of what men and women choose to be capable of. The casual allowance of an impulse here, a craving there, seems to mean little until the occasion comes when their accumulated force is sharply or terribly revealed. The laxity of the past thus declares itself; and on the other hand there is often a gathering of good to a moment of revelation. The soul that has for long years fortified itself in pious courage, in patient well-doing, in high and noble thought, leaps one day, to its own surprise, to the height of generous daring or heroic truth. We determine the issue of crises which we cannot foresee. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*) *Jael and Sisera*:—"What then!" might we, upon the first cursory perusal of this narrative, be inclined to exclaim. "Has the all pure and all holy Jehovah belied His unspeakable attributes, has He laid aside His thunder, and renounced those direful visitations which, by the mouth of His servant Moses, He had threatened against the wilful shedder of man's blood? Why are the rights of hospitality, so jealously hedged in, in the Mosaic law, and so sacredly observed in many previous instances (as in the preservation of his guest by the besieged Lot and the sparing of the Gibeonites by the deceived yet forbearing Joshua), why are these rights, here first, with impunity violated?" I. The whole of the Canaanitish nations had long since by their idolatrous iniquities and abounding profligacy and wickedness, merited the condemnation and fiery wrath of Jehovah, which had indeed been denounced against them unambiguously by the mouth of Moses on the other side of Jordan in the wilderness. No one who has read the intimations of their guilt in the Book of Leviticus can question for one moment the justice of the Almighty in blotting them from the face of the earth. Jabin, king of Canaan, trusted in the number and weight of his iron chariots, and in the almost countless host of his armed men. The God of Israel designed, therefore, to humble him to the dust by scattering his forces before the resolute assault of but a few ill-equipped Israelites, while He would sell the mighty leader of all this armament into the hands of a weak and unarmed woman. Thus would He teach the rebellious nations to "put not their strength in horses, nor in the sons of men," but to fear and reverence the one true and only God, the Lord of lords, and King of kings—the fearful God of Sabaoth. II. The Scripture narrative simply details the progress of these wonderful events for our warning and exhortation, but not necessarily for our

example. It would be as reasonable to assert that, because in the book of God's revealed truth we read of the cruelty of Saul and the transgression of David, that therefore we are to imitate them in their wickedness, as to infer from this history of the slaughter of Sisera that hence treachery is allowable. Jael's conduct, like that of the unjust steward in the parable, is commended to our notice—not for imitation, but for warning. (*F. F. Statham, B.A.*) *The defence and example of Jael*:—If Jael received Sisera into her tent with the intention of murdering him, she must be left to the execrations of posterity. But there are, we think, plain and straightforward reasons from which to infer that Jael had no design of killing Sisera—that she acted, therefore, with perfect honesty, and not with atrocious duplicity, when she offered him shelter. What likelihood is there that Jael proposed to murder Sisera? He was not her enemy, for there was peace between her husband's family and the Canaanites. She had nothing to gain by his death; and if she had, she needed only to refuse him a shelter. The enemy was in pursuit, and would quickly have overtaken the fugitive. Had she wished his death ever so much, she had nothing more to do than to leave him to his fate. He was a doomed man, and there was no necessity that she should endanger herself to ensure his destruction; for let it be well observed that the killing of Sisera was a most dangerous undertaking for a lonely woman. Whatever account may be given of her subsequent conduct, the only candid construction to be put on this part of the narrative is that Jael was thoroughly sincere in offering an asylum to Sisera—that it was not with the language of deceit, nor in order to cloak a bloody purpose, but simply in truthfulness of heart, and with the earnest desire of succouring a distressed man, that she invited the fugitive into her tent, covered him with a mantle, and refreshed him with milk. "Nevertheless," you will say, "she killed Sisera; whether premeditated or not, the murder was committed. What is to be urged in extenuation of so barbarous a deed?" This brings us to examine by what motives Jael was instigated, or on what principles she acted in putting to death her slumbering guest. We reckon it a satisfactory explanation of her conduct, and one which removes every difficulty, that she was led by a Divine impulse, or in obedience to a Divine command, to take away Sisera's life. She had probably acted from her natural feeling when offering shelter to the fugitive and giving most hospitable entertainment. We only think it a kindly part that she should go out to meet Sisera in his distress, and endeavour to shield him from further injury; but when the deep slumber was on him there came an intimation to Jael, I cannot tell you how conveyed—but certainly in such a manner as that there could be no doubt of its origin—an intimation from God that her guest must die, and that, too, by her hand. And if such were the case, again we remind you that nothing but a Divine command will explain a Divine approval. If such were the case, we challenge you to find in all the annals of Scripture a mightier display of the power of faith than was exhibited by Jael. What if Sisera should awake just in time to discover and defeat the murderous design! It was likely. He seemed indeed in deep sleep, but fresh as he was from battle, his brain must have been full of confused imagery, and the least noise must startle him as though his foes were at the door; and she having but a woman's hand and a woman's strength—shall she dare to attempt the nailing the sleeping warrior to the earth? Will not her courage fail her at the most critical moment, when there is enough done to arouse Sisera, but not to overcome? Besides, why must she be the executioner? There was little probability that Sisera could escape; in a short time the pursuers would arrive, and then the fate of Sisera could be sealed without her interference. We will believe that thoughts such as these crowded into Jael's mind; we can believe that it was a moment of terrible perplexity when she felt that she had received a commission from God, and considered the fearfulness and the peril of its execution. There must have been the natural shrinking from the shedding of blood; there must have come the cutting reflection that Sisera was her guest, and that she was pledged to his defence; there must have been dread of his revenge if she should betray her cause in its execution; but the faith of this woman triumphed over all that is most calculated to confound and dismay her. There is yet another question, which will, perhaps, suggest itself to your minds as full of great importance as those already considered. You may, perhaps, now be disposed to allow the great probability, if not the certainty, that Jael acted on a Divine command, conveyed to her after Sisera had been admitted into the tent, and you may on this account acquit her of any charge of treachery or cruelty. Then you will ask, how it could be consistent with the character of God to issue

such a command? Since murder is a crime which is expressly forbidden, with what propriety could He enjoin its perpetration? Now, just think! No one would have felt any surprise had Sisera perished in the battle. He was the oppressor of the Lord's people: what marvel, then, that he should be overtaken by vengeance? Thus also with the Canaanites; their wickedness marked them out for extermination, just as did that of the unbelief of the world before the flood came; so that if in place of employing the sword of the Israelites, God had employed a deluge, or a pestilence, we should not have had a word to say, but must have admitted the justice of His ridding the land of those by whom it was profaned. And could either Jael or the Israelites be charged with murder in performing by Divine command a just though severe action? They were only the executioners of a righteous sentence: could they on that account contract guiltiness? Why, when the law of the land has condemned a man to death, who thinks of charging the executioner with murder, because he is instrumental in executing the penalties of that law? Indeed, he has not actually invaded and rifled the sanctuary of life, as a midnight assassin who steals on his victim, and leaves him weltering in his blood; but because a competent authority has directed him to inflict death, he is no murderer, but only an obedient servant of the State when he takes the life of a fellow-man. And now having vindicated Jael, we shall not hesitate to go further, and hold her forth as an example which it should be your endeavour to imitate. We do not merely mean that having displayed strong faith, and obeyed the law, when obedience was beyond measure difficult, she has left a pattern to be followed by all who are summoned to special difficulties and sacrifices in the service of God; over and above this, the case of Jael and Sisera has a peculiar similarity to many —yea, even all—amongst yourselves, who are required by God to inflict death where they have offered hospitality. Yea, if it be the Scriptural demand that we "crucify"—"crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts"—oh, then, there is a vast similarity between our own case and that of Jael. We too must put to death the enemy whom we have cherished and received. We too must determine that we will act the executioner where we have been the patron and the host. We too must be ready to strike down that which we have embraced, and pierce that which we have admitted not only into the tent, but into the heart. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *Jael, a type of the unscrupulous helpers of a good cause:*—Long has the error prevailed that religion can be helped by using the world's weapons, by acting in the temper and spirit of the world. Of that mischievous falsehood have been born all the pride and vainglory, the rivalries and persecutions that darken the past of Christendom, surviving in strange and pitiful forms to the present day. If we shudder at the treachery in the deed of Jael, what shall we say of that which through many a year sent victims to inquisition, dungeons, and to the stake in the name of Christ? And what shall we say now of that moral assassination which in one tent and another is thought no sin against humanity, but a service of God? Among us are too many who suffer wounds keen and festering that have been given in the house of their friends, yea, in the name of the one Lord and Master. The battle of truth is a frank and honourable fight, served at no point by what is false or proud or low. To an enemy a Christian should be chivalrous, and surely no less to a brother. Granting that a man is in error, he needs a physician, not an executioner; he needs an example, not a dagger. How much farther do we get by the methods of opprobrium and cruelty, the innuendo and the whisper of suspicion? Besides, it is not the Siseras to-day who are dealt with after this manner. It is the "schismatic" within the camp on whom some Jael falls with a hammer and a nail. If a Church cannot stand by itself, approved to the consciences of men, it certainly will not be helped by a return to the temper of barbarism and the craft of the world (2 Cor. x. 4). (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*) *Sin slain:*—If the story of the world's sufferings under different tyrants could all be written, there would be no man found who would be capable of reading it. I believe that even the despots themselves, who have committed the atrocities to which I refer, would not be sufficiently cold-blooded to sit down and read the account of the agonies which their own victims have endured. I have been struck in passing through many lands with the horrible sufferings which in the olden times were endured by the poor at the hands of the rich kings and lords who were their oppressors. In almost every town in which you enter, you either have shown to you the rack, the dark dungeon, the thumb-screw, or the infernal machine, or instruments too horrible to describe—that make one's blood run chill at the very thought and sight of them. Sin has brought more plagues upon this earth than all

the earth's tyrants. I. First let us try to picture THE SINNER GROWING UNEASY UNDER THE YOKE OF HIS SINS, AND PLANNING A REVOLT AGAINST HIS OPPRESSORS. It is said that when a man is born a slave, slavery is not near so irksome as when he has once been free. You will have found it, perhaps, in birds and such animals that we keep under our control. If they have never known what it is to fly to and fro in the air from tree to tree, they are happy in the cage; but if, after having once seen the world, and floated in the clear air, they are condemned to live in slavery, they are far less content. This is the case with man—he is born a slave. Until the Spirit of God comes into the heart—so strange is the use of nature—we live contented in our chains; we walk up and down our dungeon, and think we are at large. It is one of the first marks of Divine life when we grow discontented and begin to fight against sin. II. And now we have the second picture—THE SINNER HAVING GONE TO WAR WITH HIS OWN SINS HAS, TO A GREAT EXTENT, BY GOD'S GRACE, OVERCOME THEM; but he feels when this is done, that it is not enough, that external morality will not save the soul. Like Barak, he has conquered Sisera; but, not content with seeing him flee away on his feet, he wants to have his dead body before him. Rest not content till the blood of thine enemy stain the ground, until he be crushed, and dead, and slain. Oh, sinner, I beseech thee never be content until grace reign in thy heart, and sin be altogether subdued. Indeed, this is what every renewed soul longs for, and must long for, nor will it rest satisfied until all this shall be accomplished. III. I stand at the DOOR to-day, not of a tent, but of a TOMB, and as I stand here I say to the sinner who is anxious to know how his sins may be killed, how his corruption may be slain, "Come, and I will show thee the man whom thou seekest, and when you shall come in, YOU SHALL SEE YOUR SINS LYING DEAD, AND THE NAILS IN THEIR TEMPLES." Sinner, the sin thou dreadest is forgiven, thou hast wept sore before God, and thou hast cast thyself on Christ and on Christ alone. In the name of Him who is the Eternal God I assure thee that thy sins are all forgiven. Further—dost thou ask where thy sin is? I tell thee thy sin is gone, so that it never can be recalled. Thou art so forgiven that thy sins can never have a resurrection. The nail is not driven through the hands of thy sins, but through their temples. The spear that pierced the Saviour's heart pierced the heart of thine iniquity; the grave in which He was buried was the tomb of all thy sins; and His resurrection was the resurrection of thy spirit to light and joy unspeakable. God forbid we should ever glory in sin, but it is a theme for joy to a Christian when he can look upon his sins drowned in the blood of Jesus. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Jael's deed:*—When Jael received him, she did so no doubt in good faith, nor had she heard of his overwhelming disaster. She would be only too ready to afford shelter to the proudest warrior of those regions. It is not unlikely that while he was sleeping she began to reflect upon the strangeness of his being in a condition to need such succour, and that from fugitives and others passing by she learned the story of that eventful day. She found that it was no longer a victor, but a baffled and helpless fugitive, who lay in her tent. She probably had a dim idea also of his character, as an enemy of the God of heaven whom the Israelites worshipped. A sudden impulse seized her; she would despatch him as he lay. Was he not the worst of oppressors? Did he deserve to live? Besides, the cries of the pursuers already echo through the mountains, and their weapons flash amid the foliage. The wretched Sisera is too exhausted to offer a dangerous resistance. She enters the apartment and strikes him. He staggers up; then in a swoon he falls at her feet. An iron tent-pin, to which the cords of the tent were fastened, is in her hand, and a mallet. She drives the iron pin through his temples into the earth, with a blow given in the superhuman strength of frenzied excitement. Then voices are heard in the forest. The pursuers have come up; it is Barak himself (ver. 22). The whole story appears perfectly natural; nor is there any need for the supposition of Jael acting under a Divine impulse or a special Divine commission. Her act was dictated as much by self-interest as by any other motive. It was a moment of wild excitement, and cannot be judged by the rules of our peaceable and decorous time. If in the great Indian mutiny we had heard of Nana Sahib having been entrapped and killed by some wild woman of a wandering tribe, the public opinion of England would not have scrutinised too closely the morality of the action, in its joy at being rid of the most infamous of murderers. It is, in fact, the eulogy pronounced by Deborah which has constituted the difficulty. And a difficulty it must always remain to those who believe that every word uttered by those who of old had the name and rank of prophets is a direct utterance of the Divine will. The difficulty,

however, disappears if we view the splendid ode of Deborah as being included by the guidance of the Spirit of God among the records of His ancient Church, and as expressing the feelings of an Israelite patriot of that day. The holiest and most devout of the Church of that age would respond to Deborah's language. Whether such sentiments would be appropriate in our own day is not in question: we believe in the doctrine and in the fact of progressive light. (*L. H. Wiseman, M.A.*)

Ver. 20. **Thou shalt say, No.**—*Thou shalt say, No*:—A human being has his destiny, in some measure, in his own hands, depending on his own voluntary determinations. We cannot define exactly the limits of the province of free-will, but that it has a province, and an important one, all consciousness attests. It is true that man, like the animals and the vegetables, is subject to those laws of his being which he had no choice in enacting, and to the outside influences which he does not invite, and they must needs go far towards deciding his character. But not exclusively. He can enact laws for himself, impose actions upon himself, and, what it is our business to consider now, he possesses a certain qualified, but real veto-power. He can, to a large extent, not suppress, but repress and hold in check, some of the laws and tendencies and demands of his own nature. And he can, in a degree, reject outside influences and solicitations, push them aside, defy them, avert them. He can veto them, can say "No" to them. And according as he says it, and says it on right occasions, says it promptly, decisively, he maintains the splendid self-sovereignty of manhood. A brave, frequent, and absolute exercise of the veto-power with which he is endowed, is one of the fixed conditions of success and honour in the world, of self-respect and dignity of character, of harmony with God and the happiness of life. I. THE EXERCISE OF THIS SUPREME POWER IN REFERENCE TO THE TENDENCIES AND INCLINATIONS WITHIN ONE'S SELF. There are tendencies and appetites in every man which, if allowed a free course and full swing, would drag him in the mire and hurry him to his ruin. The meanest of them has slain its thousands. So mean and paltry an appetite as that for stimulating drink counts its victims by millions, and our nature is largely made up of such dangerous proclivities, some inborn and some acquired. There is in man, also, a certain inscrutable, central authority, the mysterious Ego, the indefinable "I myself," whose office is to watch over these necessary but dangerous members of the internal commonwealth, and keep them to their limits, and say, "No" to each and all their demands for undue power and over-indulgence. No man can live at all without exerting this power at some points; and no man can live nobly, and to the highest purposes of his being, without exerting it constantly, at all points, and with absolute supremacy. In the biographies of all persons eminent for character and achievement, you will notice how they have striven to acquire perfectly this form of self-mastery. What ingenious devices and shrewd practices they have resorted to, to this end. In some ages, what fasts and penances and seclusions and all forms of asceticisms, and in all ages what vigorous efforts, what watchfulness, and what contrivances and habits of self-discipline, whereby they might be able with promptitude and effect to say "No" to any tendency that is getting too strong, and any desire that is too clamorous! And success in that is their salvation, the open secret of their success in their high aims, and the glory of their lives. II. THE CIRCUMSTANCES AND EVENTS AROUND US. These are very powerful, seemingly irresistible often. They claim to take full possession of a man, to carry him whither they will, and make of him what they will. They seem to say to him, "We are a part of the irresistible order of nature; we move according to the eternal laws; we represent the forces of the universe; we come backed by the omnipotence of the Creator. What can you, poor, puny mortal, do in resistance to our overwhelming might? A pitiful speck of being as you are, an evanescent bubble on this vast sea of matter and force, what is there for you but to drift whithersoever we may carry you, and sink where we drop you?" But not so, thou majestic universe, bearing upon man as you do with all your infinite might in the events and circumstances around us—not so! The soul in man, that mysterious essence, whose very existence you bring into question, is in its rightful province a match for you, can resist you, set you aside, say "No" to you, and in the ethereal, Godlike power it is endowed with, and with the humility of a little child, make good its audacious defiance. The brave but wary seaman knows the tremendous power of an adverse wind, a power that nothing can withstand, knows it and respects it, yet he is master of the situation. He can anchor in the roadstead, and look the very hurricane in the face, and let it blow. He will not budge. He can

wait. That force will be spent before his will be. He will yet lay his course right along the pathway of the storm, and he does, and makes his voyage triumphantly. Or in another case he refuses to drift with it. He will move right on against the opposing force, and never stop a moment, nor furl his sails; he must beat, go zigzag, tediously, but he gets on against it, and if need be, he will make the entire Atlantic voyage without one favourable breeze, with hard struggles but no yielding, delayed but not defeated. So in all human life. The power of circumstances must be respected, and dealt with valiantly but warily. The true man will accommodate himself to them, and yet refuse to drift with them; nay, will circumvent them, outwatch them, and make them serve his purpose. They may delay him, but not turn him back; discourage him, but not pluck heart of hope out of him. They may change his direction, but not stop his progress. They may change the form of his duty, but cannot hinder doing. They may combine to tempt and assail his integrity or purity, but if he say in God's name, "No!" they cannot touch it. III. IT IS MOST PRACTICAL TO CONSIDER THE EXERCISE OF THIS VETO-POWER IN REFUSING THE REQUESTS OF OTHER PERSONS. There are always about us those who ask us or propose to us to do things that we ought not or had better not do. And such is the strength of the social tie, and so potent the influence of another's desire, that there is always a disposition to comply, and an amiable disposition it is in itself. But it is often very misleading, and sometimes fatal to honour and integrity, to purity and peace and every sacred interest of life. Many a youth and many a man, not depraved, but simply weak and unestablished, has thus been led to his ruin, out of mere good-natured compliance and the difficulty of refusing a solicitation. Balancing between good and evil, with the promise and possibility of the best, he has gone to the bad, because he could not, or felt that he could not, say, "No!" The dangerous tendencies that are in him, and that are in everybody, acquire tenfold power when reinforced by the importunity of a friendly companion to join him in giving way to them. That little off-hand suit, "Come along," coupled with the suggestion, "What's the harm?" or "Who will know it?" or "Just this once," or "Don't be a coward," we cannot tell how many it leads astray every day, initiates in the downward path, and that too when every instinct of the conscience, every sentiment of honour, every affection of their heart, and every hope of their lives, is breathing its protest, and would hold them back. If all those hesitating consents could now be recalled, that fatal compliance reversed, and it should be as if the rightful refusals had been spoken in place of them, what blessed results should we see. Oh, learn betimes to say, "No!" when you know you ought to say it. Fear not the sneers of the evil-disposed, the corrupt, or the merely thoughtless, but fear rather the anguish and tears of those who love you, the strings of your conscience, and the displeasure of your God. Be prompt and strong to say, "No!" when you ought, and your better nature bids you, and so march on through your career in safety, honour, and peace. And it is not only to the solicitations or the suggestions that would lead us in fatal directions, into enslaving vices, or the outright sacrifice of truth, honour, and purity that we need to exercise this great prerogative of downright refusal in the thick of this our social city life, we have need to exercise it daily, and almost hourly, in respect to requests and invitations that have no bad intent, but are meant in courtesy and kindness, and that in other circumstances, and at other times, might be complied with in all propriety. We need, on moral grounds, to guard with some jealousy our personal independence, and let nobody unduly or unreasonably invade it. We cannot afford to hold ourselves, our time, faculties, thoughts, or even sympathies, entirely at the beck and call even of the best people or of the kindest-meaning friends. That high independence which never hesitates to say, "No!" whenever and to whomsoever it should be said commands respect. It is a chief element of all nobleness and strength of character. It is essential to feminine dignity, and to the highest manhood. It makes you worth seeking, and causes your refusals to be better taken than the loose assents of those facile persons who from sheer weakness in the fibre and the making up of their character can never say, "No!" or say it as if guilty of an offence and fearful of your displeasure. (*George Putnam.*) *Thou shalt say, No*:—Here is one of the shortest words in our language; yet there is none which persons of an easy and yielding disposition find it so difficult to pronounce. To say it, however, is one of the first lessons which we have occasion to learn, and one of the most frequent we are called upon to practise. You can hardly mention a cause which has done more to lead men into embarrassment,

distress, and crime, than disregard of this caution. A young man just entering into life is solicited by his gay companions to take part in their dissipations. He feels that it would be wrong; that it can lead to nothing but evil. And yet he cannot muster resolution enough to say, "No." He consents, goes on from step to step, and in the end is ruined. An affectionate mother is besought by her children to grant them some improper indulgence. She feels that it would be an improper indulgence; that it can only do them harm. And yet she cannot find it in her heart to say, "No." I. In the first place, then, LET US LEARN TO RESPECT OUR OWN JUDGMENT IN WHAT WE DO. If, on a view of all the circumstances, we think we ought to say, "No," let us have the courage and firmness and independence to say it. A man who dares not act according to his own convictions of what is right, for fear that after all he may be mistaken—I will not say that he has no regard for conscience, but this I will say: he has no confidence in conscience, which in practice amounts to nearly the same thing. Besides, with respect to the construction which other people may put on our motives, if we only take care that our motives are what they should be, and that our whole conduct is in keeping, we need not entertain any apprehensions but that in the long run ample justice will be done them by all whose approbation is worth having. I have shown that it is but the part of a manly independence to have the courage and firmness to say, "No," when we are convinced that this is the proper word. II. I proceed to show THAT IT IS NO LESS A DICTATE OF PRUDENCE, AND PRACTICAL WISDOM. You can hardly step your foot on the threshold of life without encountering seduction in every possible shape; and unless you are prepared to resist it firmly, you are a doomed man. What makes it still more dangerous is, that the first solicitations of vice often come under such disguised forms, and relate to things seemingly so trivial, as to give hardly any warning of the fatal consequences, to which by slow and insensible gradations they are almost sure to lead. As you value, then, your health and reputation, your peace of mind and personal independence, learn to say, "No." Inquire into the sources of human misery, study the first beginnings of crime, and, meet with it where you may, by tracing it back to its first cause you will find it to have been, in almost every instance, merely because they could not say, "No," to the tempter. Put the question to one who has wasted his substance in riotous living. The burden of their confession will be, that they owe every calamity which has befallen them to their not having had firmness enough, at some turning-point of their destiny, to say, "No." As you would avoid their fate, let me then conjure you to avoid its cause. III. The same conduct which I have shown to be necessary to a manly independence and to a prudent regard to our own interest I shall next prove TO BE IN NO SENSE INCONSISTENT WITH A BENEVOLENT AND TRULY GENEROUS DISPOSITION. One of the most common mistakes on this subject is to confound an easy disposition with a benevolent disposition: two things which in fact are as wide asunder as the east from the west. A man of an easy disposition is so commonly merely because he will not make the effort a more firm and steady conduct requires. And why will he not make this effort? Because he will not take the trouble of making it. But is this benevolence? Is it so much as an abuse of benevolence? Is it not sheer selfishness? IV. Having shown that independence, prudence, and benevolence alike require the conduct I have been recommending, it only remains for me TO URGE IT UPON YOU AS A MATTER OF MORAL AND RELIGIOUS DUTY. It is a great error, though a common one, not to suppose that the principle of duty extends to almost all our actions; requiring them or forbidding them, as being either right or wrong. We talk of actions as being honourable or dishonourable, as being prudent or imprudent, as being benevolent or otherwise, but what is honourable or prudent or benevolent is also right. Everything, therefore, which has already been said to prove the conduct in question a dictate of benevolence, prudence, and manly independence, goes also to the same extent to prove it to be our duty, our imperative duty. Besides, take the words as they stand. If, considering all the circumstances, we ought to say, "No," then it is our duty to say it, let the consequences be what they may. Some men can never say, "No," unless they are in a passion, and are therefore driven to the mortifying necessity of working themselves up into a passion before they can find the courage to do it. Again, there are others, who will trust themselves to say, "No," only as a matter of policy; and with whom, therefore, the question is not, "What ought I to say?" but, "What will it be for my interest to say?" There is also a third class that will say, "No"—and say it often enough too, if that were all—from mere churlishness and ill-humour; but I need not observe that this is very far from being the conduct

I am here recommending. Putting aside all such considerations, let us learn to resist improper solicitations from a sense of duty. It should be enough to know that it is our duty. Let us act on this principle, and we shall never refuse except when duty requires it; but at such times our refusal will be much more decided and effectual, while it will be made under circumstances of much greater dignity on our part, and of much less irritation on the part of those whom it may disappoint. Moreover, while we act from a sense of duty, we should connect with this feeling a conviction that it is one of religious obligation. God has required us to pursue a course of undeviating rectitude. Whoever, therefore, would seduce us from this sets himself against God, and we must deny one or the other. Whether in such a case we should deny God rather than man let conscience judge. (*Jas. Walker.*)

Ver. 23. **So God subdued on that day Jabin.**—*A great victory—but God's:*—I. WHAT HE DID: "God subdued . . . Jabin the king." 1. This is the normal issue of God's activity. For God to act is for Him to conquer. Where the victory tarries, it is only God waiting. 2. He subdued Jabin the king of Canaan. Who is able to stand against Him? 3. Every oppressor of God's people becomes His foe. He who molests them virtually challenges God. II. HOW HE DID IT: "So." 1. By inspiring Deborah with a holy courage. 2. By arrangement. The plan of salvation is only one grand instance of the Divine order. III. WHEN HE DID IT: "On that day." God never miscalculates. The Eternal is never late. 1. It was as soon as they wanted it. 2. It was when they were most ready to receive it. IV. WHERE HE DID IT: "Before the children of Israel." 1. There are many things which God must do out of our sight. 2. There are instances when He works by signs which are visible—Red Sea; Carmel. This victory was not only decided, but manifest. (*E. M. Mouchin.*)

CHAPTER V.

VERS. 1–11. **Then sang Deborah and Barak.**—*Leaders who lead:*—This is far better given in the Revised Version: "For that the leaders took the lead in Israel, for that the people offered themselves willingly, bless ye the Lord." The poetess gives two reasons why her enterprise was successful. I. THE FIRST REASON OF SUCCESS WAS THAT THE LEADERS TOOK THE LEAD. They were not engaged elsewhere; they did not linger; they were not too excessively modest. They were in the forefront of the enterprise in resource and enthusiasm and execution. The leaders in those days in Israel were the heads of the tribes. In ancient society there was always an arrangement which provided natural leaders to whom the people could look. In spite of what some people may say to the contrary, there is a great deal of loyalty still in the people to what might be called their natural leaders, and I may say this, that our aristocracy have immense advantages on their side if only they have the heart to give themselves to public work. It is the man with the biggest and clearest and keenest brain that is the leader in modern times. The thinker, the orator, the author, the journalist, the inventor, the scientist—these are the men to whom we now look to give the watchword and lead us in public work. I think it is vain to deny that money is a great power in modern times, and the making of it is a rough test of ability, although it is a very humble illustration of my text. In politics and in reforms in the Church and the municipality we should get quit of those awful wrongs and abuses which disfigure our life, and we could raise our people to higher and nobler life if only the leaders would take the lead. Unfortunately they do not do it. Very often the best causes have to do without those that should be the leaders. They do not get the people with ten talents, and have to struggle along as best they can with the people who have one talent, and who use it for the glory of God and the good of men. This may be due to the fact that those who should be leaders are occupied with their own affairs, and have no heart for the public interest. Those who have most of this world's means and influence are often living a life of frivolity and selfishness. Those who are

engaged in the struggle of life are often thinking of nothing but enriching themselves. Those who have the finest culture often keep aloof from the profane multitude. Or the fact that the leaders do not take the lead may be due to timidity and over-caution. Any change that alters the *status quo* must give annoyance and cause loss to somebody. When once a reform is matter of history, and is put down in books of history, all men praise it, but while it is being accomplished few men praise and many oppose. I remember a few years ago there was hardly a newspaper in the country in which there was not a leader in praise of Wilberforce and the noble men who co-operated with him in that great reform. But in his own day Wilberforce and his coadjutors were not praised at all. They were even exposed to personal violence. Every evil name was flung at them. Drunkenness is inflicting on our country evils so vast and potent that any considerable diminution of it, say the reduction of it by half, would be a reform infinitely greater than those reforms by which our statesmen are at present winning their laurels. But if a statesman of the first mark, a man of the calibre of Mr. Balfour or Mr. Chamberlain or Mr. Morley, were to take the lead on this subject, he would simply be shrieked at by all who are engaged in that traffic. II. The other reason given by this ancient heroine for her success was THAT THE PEOPLE WILLINGLY FOLLOWED. Leaders cannot win a cause; it is won by the followers. Now sometimes the people do not follow even when the leaders take the lead. 1. Instead of that, they wish themselves to take the lead. Many a cause has been wrecked by the jealousies and suspicions of those who have thought they were fit for positions greater than were assigned to them. We often hear of the need of first-class leaders, but I sometimes think what the world needs most is great numbers of men who are willing to take the second place, or the third place, or the fourth place, and to work as heartily there as if they were in the first place. That requires even more heroism. The man who is in the first place attracts the eyes of all, and may receive his reward in fame, but the man who works well in an obscure place only receives the reward of the cause itself. 2. Another reason why the people do not always follow is that they are criticising instead of following. Now I should not like to conclude without referring to the last words of my text, "Bless ye the Lord." Deborah attributed the success to the leaders taking the lead and the people following willingly, but she went beyond these means, and traced all to the Lord. (*J. Stalker, D.D.*) *Leaders:*—Now in this text we are called upon to celebrate our leaders, "for that the leaders took the lead in Israel." Deborah, with a fine instinct, perceived the singular value of great and heroic leaders. In some directions to-day there is a disposition to obscure greatness, to deny, I was going to say, the supreme value of splendid talents. Oh, let us recognise the rights of the people. We must never forget in this world the wonderful importance of the man as against the multitude. The Roman soldier was a master in his art and profession, but what would all the Roman soldiers have been but a rabble without Cæsar? I dare say those sailors four centuries ago were brave and skilful Italians and Spaniards, but they would have done very little with that barque on the Atlantic without Columbus. You may have fine masons and painters, but if St. Peter's is to be built in Rome or St. Paul's in London you must have Michael Angelo in one place and Sir Christopher Wren in the other. Oh, no, let us acknowledge the multitude, and all the rights that pertain to them, but that need not for a moment obscure our mind as to the appreciation of men of supreme genius. "For the leaders that took the lead bless ye the Lord." The great architects, the great navigators, the great captains; they are all great gifts of God to humanity. Outside a great leader is the architect of civilisation, and in the Church a great leader is the organiser of victory. (*W. L. Watkinson.*) *Deborah: a mother in Israel:*—Deborah was an extraordinary woman. In strength of understanding, in strength of will, in soundness of judgment, in splendid courage, in warmth of heart, and, withal, in what we would nowadays call literary genius, Deborah was an absolute miracle of many sides. There was neither king, nor captain, nor judge, nor prophet, nor psalmist, nor a man to be called a man in all Israel in those evil days till Deborah arose with all those things in herself. To begin with, Deborah's name came to be known outside of her own house by her strong sense and her open, fair, masculine mind. Her neighbours were constantly falling into disputes and quarrels, and the way Deborah dealt with all those disputes and quarrels soon made her name famous. Her house in Mount Ephraim was a refuge to all the oppressed. Her palm tree was a strong tower to which all the afflicted people continually came up. At the same time, with all that, Deborah's

name would never have come down to us had it not been for the terrible oppression that lay on all Israel from their enemies round about. But while all this went on Deborah was only walking all the closer with her God at Bethel. Deborah does not put it into her song—she cannot put everything into one song—but how she would go out to meditate and to pray under Jacob's ladder after her day's work was done! How she would seek wisdom and direction at that House of God. What was it that made Deborah arise at last and come forth from her own house to be the mother in all Israel she was and is? Was it the death of Lapidoth, her husband, that made her a widow indeed, and set her free to follow out her mighty hopes for the house of Israel? Had her sons been carried into captivity of the King of Canaan; and had it been better for her daughters that they had never been born? It was some of these things, it was all these things taken together that at last roused up the slumbering lioness in Deborah's bosom, and made her swear beside the sacred stone in Bethel that Israel should be set free. But, after all, Deborah was only a woman. And to discomfit Sisera and his nine hundred chariots of iron demanded a man at the head of ten thousand men; while in all the tribe of Ephraim there was nothing but women. And Deborah sent, says her history, and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kadesh-Naphtali, and said unto him, Hath not the Lord God of Israel commanded, saying, go, and draw toward Mount Tabor, and I will draw out Sisera the captain of Jabin's army, and I will deliver him into thine hand. Arise, Barak, and lead captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam. / In what is perhaps the most beautiful volume of sermons that has been published in England since Dr. Newman came down from the English pulpit, though a very different volume in many ways, the late Master of Balliol says that the first of Christian duties in our day is the removal of the evils of our great towns. Now one of the two worst evils of all our great towns will never be removed till a mother like Deborah arises in our Israel. There is one evil in all our great towns that our Barak-like men may and must remove. And my heart is toward the governors of Israel that offered themselves willingly among the people. But the other great evil is one that the women, and more especially the mothers, of our great towns must take into their own hands. It will need Deborah and Barak too. It will need all Deborah's strength of understanding, and all her strength of will, and all her soundness of judgment, and all her warmth of heart, and all her splendour of courage, and all her wholeness of devotion, as well as all her genius, to speak it home and to write it home to our slow and selfish hearts. But you are not a queen, or a princess, or a peeress, and because you cannot do everything you sit still and do nothing. No. But have you not a fire-side, and a lady friend or two, and a spare hour on a Saturday or a Sabbath night? Have you no imagination? Have you no heart? Have you no apprehension? Have you no son or nephew? (*A. Whyte, D.D.*) *National mercies and national sins*:—I. THE GROUNDS OF THANKFULNESS which Deborah thought she and the whole nation had. 1. She insists, first, upon the cheerful willingness of the people, their ready alacrity in obeying the call of the Lord their God, when by her voice He summoned them to arms. Oh! that there were such a heart in each one of us! Spiritual readiness is the attitude and the grace of angels. God desires, and will have, from us all, hearty service. Whether as regards our substance or our time, our talents or our affections, the Word declares, "God loveth a cheerful giver." 2. Deborah notices gratefully the interference of God Himself in behalf of the nation. What could Israel, in their enslaved and enfeebled state, have done against Jabin's nine hundred chariots? Of what avail would have been the willingness of the people or the valour of the chiefs if the Lord had provided no succours? But the Lord had provided them. And like mercies have been vouchsafed to us with regard to our personal and individual conflicts with sin and Satan. Satan is especially called the "prince of the power of the air"; what would the rude implements of earthly warfare avail against such an antagonist? No; God puts the spiritual against the spiritual; He brings the arms of an invisible providence to bear upon the spiritual fortunes of a child of God, and to keep him from falling. Angels are ministering to us whilst we sleep; the elements are combining for our good, even when we know not the very existence of evil; and never till we are beyond the reach of evil and sin shall we know how the Lord "fought" for our souls "from heaven," or how "the stars in their courses fought against Sisera." 3. Deborah finds matter of thankfulness in the peaceful and happy state of the country contrasted with its condition under the oppressions of Jabin; and to this part of Deborah's song I entreat your special attention. Her picture of two countries, or at least of the same country under two different governments, will

be found to have such an astonishing parallel that I hope every heart amongst us will be lifted up to God with silent thankfulness. Observe, then, first, Deborah speaks of a country where all trade was stopped: "In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were unoccupied." The great public thoroughfares were all closed; the caravans could no longer convey their merchandise from city to city; the merchants found their occupation gone. Then, secondly, she says that in this country travelling had become unsafe: "The travellers walked through byways." The complete lawlessness of the people and the bold effrontery of the robber made those who had occasion to travel seek the most lonely and unfrequented byways. Every step they took was taken with fear; they saw death or danger at every turn. Then, thirdly, she says that there was no tilling of the ground: "The inhabitants of the villages ceased." The constant incursions of lawless hordes had driven the villagers from their peaceful employments; the cessation of commerce throughout the land had closed the market for their grain; whilst for the sake of personal safety the poor villagers were obliged to leave their humble abodes and take refuge in walled and fenced cities. Fourthly, she says that there was no administration of justice. The "people of the Lord" could not "go down to the gates"—"the gates" signifying, as you are aware, in the Jewish language, the courts of justice. In the eighth verse she gives the reason why all judicial proceedings were suspended: "Then was war in the gates." The courts of justice resounded with the noise of arms; the gravity of the judge was merged in the zeal of the soldier; the magistrates had lost all dignity and the people all respect for law. Lastly, she says that no dependence could be placed on the military strength of the country: "Was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel?" All energy was now gone; all public spirit had decayed; anarchy and misrule held sovereign sway, and order and good government were banished from the land. I need not stay to tell you where this awful picture of national misery and misrule has but a too faithful counterpart. I pass on to another picture, which, God be praised, hath its counterpart also. "What is the state of our country now?" asks Deborah. "Why, our nobles ride secure on white asses; our judges, without fear, sit in judgment at the gates, undisturbed by the noise of archers in the places of drawing water; and the people, as they walk by the way, rehearse the righteous acts of the Lord. Now all is peaceful among us; our ships ride upon the sea; our caravans throng the highways; our villages revive amid the busy industry of pruning-hook and ploughshare; and now all that remains for us is to testify, by a song of thankfulness, our gratitude to God." Neither should there be lost upon us Deborah's invitation to different classes of society to join in this song of gratitude. First, you will perceive, she calls upon the noble and the wealthy: "'Speak, ye that ride on white asses.' Who gave you your wealth? Who has preserved to you your wealth? To whom alone is the praise due that your substance has not been wrested from you by bands of marauders; that you have not been driven from your country by the insecurity of property; that, under the protecting shadow of equal laws, you can now lie down with safety, none making you afraid?" Then, secondly, she speaks to magistrates and judges. "'Speak, ye that sit in judgment.' Who has preserved your office in all its reverence? Who has continued your lives in all their sacredness? Who has kept your authority in all the respect in which the people hold it?" Then, thirdly, she addresses herself to those who are engaged in the ordinary occupations of life. "'Speak, ye that walk by the way'; following your peaceful employments without fear of the public robber, without dread of lawless assemblages, reposing under your own vine and your own fig-tree; rehearse the wonderful works of God. Yes, 'high and low, rich and poor,' rehearse the righteous acts of the Lord, even His righteous acts towards the inhabitants of the villages of Israel." And have we no part to bear in Deborah's song? Oh! shall there be a British heart cold or a British tongue dumb while we think of our signal, eminent—I might almost say solitarily enjoyed blessings? "Awake, awake," England; "awake, awake, utter a song." Let us, while we bewail her sins and confess her pride, mourn over her luxurious living when thousands are starving for the bread of life—let us also bless God for His mercies to this our land. Let us bless Him that blood hath not yet stained our streets; that our ears tingle not with the sound of artillery; that the file and the hammer are yet heard in our shops; and that our churches are still open, where we may praise and worship God. II. SOME CAUSES OF SORROW AND STERN REBUKE. The Lord's cause had triumphed, as triumph it ever will, whether we "come to the help of the Lord" or not. Still the names of those shall be told

up who come to the Lord's help, in order that it may be seen who are to be shut out from the triumph, who are to have no part in the joy, who are to have no mention in God's book of remembrance, save to their dishonour and their shame. 1. First, some are noticed reprehensibly by Deborah because of the contentions and strifes among them: "For the divisions of Reuben there were great searchings of heart." Oh! take ye good heed; for if at this moment you are cherishing an unkind feeling towards any human being, you are cherishing that which is an eternal foe to godliness; you are cherishing that which may drive the Spirit of God from your souls; you are cherishing that which in your dying hour will cause you bitter searchings of heart. 2. But another sin which Deborah notices, as excluding the parties who had committed it from all part in Israel's triumph, is the sin of slothfulness—the love of ease, an unwillingness to endure the hardships and encounter the difficulties of the Christian life: "Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleatings of the flocks?" Are there not many who never make a sacrifice, never impose on themselves any form of restraint, who are conscious of nothing worthy of the name of effort, whose life is one of gilded, cushioned, luxurious ease, without one struggle or one act of self-denial? 3. But another occasion of unfaithfulness to the Lord's cause is an absorbing interest in worldly engagements: "Dan remained in ships," and "Asher continued on the sea-shore." Oh! be not deceived by that refined artifice of Satan which tempts you to persist in the pursuit of that which he persuades you is lawful. Heaven has fixed its own law of preferences, has determined which of two interests shall be sacrificed if an occasion arise in which we must sacrifice one. What amount of "corn and wine and oil" will compensate us for the loss of the "light of God's countenance"? What emergency or extremity in our domestic affairs could ever supersede that imperative law, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you"? 4. There is one more excluding sin mentioned by Deborah, the sin of religious indifference—the sin of a Gallio-like, uncaring, unthinking spirit—the sin of a Loadicean lukewarmness about the things of God. "Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof." Why? For any positive sin which they had committed? For any great scandal which they had brought on the Lord's name and cause? No, but "because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty." It seems as if God were speaking from the thick cloud to each one amongst us, and asking, not "What have you left undone?" but "What have you done?"—done for God, done for eternity, done for "the help of the Lord against the mighty"? And think not to escape with the plea that opportunity is wanting for thus serving God. I tell you that every relation in life affords scope for this pious activity. As masters, you may counsel; as parents, you may teach; as friends, you may speak "a word in season"; as rich, you may give of your substance to promote good works; as poor, you may promote benevolent objects by daily and earnest prayer. But if in none of these ways you are conscious of helping the Lord, if neither by your counsel, nor by your encouragement, nor by your example, nor by your prayers, you come to the Lord's help, then are you included among "the inhabitants of Meroz," and the curse of Meroz abides upon your souls. (*D. Moore, M.A.*) **I, even I.**—*The big "I"*:—Archdeacon Hare tells us that of all peoples, so far as he knows, the English people are the only people who write the first personal pronoun in one capital letter, "I." He further tells us that this fact lets in a good deal of light upon the English character, much that is favourable to the Englishman, and perhaps a good deal that is unfavourable. Now I will dwell—I. Upon two of THE FAVOURABLE THINGS he mentions. 1. He says that the letter "I," that stands up by itself, expresses the freedom and independency of the Englishman. It is a good thing to be free and independent. But I don't want you children to be independent in the wrong sense. You are very dependent little creatures, and have all been very dependent ever since you were born—so dependent upon your mother's care and your father's love. I want you to feel that you are very dependent indeed, and above all that you are very dependent upon God. But yet there is a sense in which we ought to be independent and free. The boy who does not insist upon exercising his own freedom and independency is very soon despised, and he very soon goes to the bad. 2. The letter "I" also denotes the Englishman's firmness. It is wonderful how firm we can be if we have planted our foot in the right place. No one is so firm as the man who has planted his foot upon the Rock of Ages, or the Truth as it is in Jesus. When a man has learnt what the Saviour expects of him, and says, "God helping me, I will do it," he puts down his foot upon a foundation which can

never give way. II. I will mention now two of THE UNFAVOURABLE THINGS referred to by Archdeacon Hare. 1. He tells us that the letter "I" shows a certain amount of arrogance. He says that the proudest word in English, to judge by its way of carrying itself, is this "I." There it is, lifting its head up above everybody else, and looking down with contempt upon its little neighbours. Now that is not a good thing. That is utterly unlike the Lord Jesus. He was meek and gentle in spirit: He never looked down upon any one, but welcomed poor broken-down sinners to His presence, and ever spoke a kind word to the world's outcasts. 2. The capital "I" represents the Englishman's reserve and isolation. It loves to stand alone, and does not believe in mixing up with others. Let us no longer hold ourselves aloof, but be kind and gentle to all. Whenever you meet another, do not gather yourself up in your little coat, and conclude that you must be better than he; but be ready to draw near and shake hands with another little boy; and, if he is poorer than you, there is a special chance for you to do him a little kindness. Remember that it is the will of Jesus that we should be very kind to each other, and in His name, yea, and for His sake, bless all. (*D. Davies.*) They chose new gods; then was war in the gates.—*The soldier's honour:*—Here is—1. The apostasy of the people: "They chose new gods." This I call the alarm; for ungodliness calls to war. If we fight against God, we provoke God to fight against us. Then—2. A laying on of punishment. God meets their abomination with desolation; the hand of justice against the hand of unrighteousness: "Then was war in the gates." This I call the battle. Then—3. A destitution of remedy: "Was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel?" Sin had not only brought war, but taken away defence—sent them unarmed to fight. And this I call the forlorn hope. I. THE ALARM: "They chose new gods." Their idolatry may be aggravated by three circumstances or degrees. They are all declining and downwards: there is evil, worse, and worst of all. 1. "They chose." Here is a frank choice, no compelling. They voluntarily took to themselves, and betook themselves to, other gods. There is evil, the first degree. 2. "Gods." What! a people trained up in the knowledge of one God: "Jehovah, I am; and there is none besides Me." The bees have but one king, flocks and herds but one leader, the sky but one sun, the world but one God. 3. "New gods." Will any nation change their gods? No; the Ekronites will keep their god, though it be Beelzebub; the Ammonites will keep their god, though it be Melchom; the Syrians will stick to their god, though it be Rimmon; the Philistines will not part with their god, though it be Dagon. And shall Israel change Jehovah, the living God? This is worst of all. II. We come now to THE BATTLE: "Then was war in the gates." If Israel give God an alarm of wickedness, God will give them a battle of desolation. Idolatry is an extreme impiety; therefore against it the gate of heaven is barred (1 Cor. vi. 9). Let us view the punishment as it is described: "Then was war in the gates." 1. The nature of it: "War." War is that miserable desolation that finds a land before it like Eden, and leaves it behind it like Sodom and Gomorrah, a desolate and forsaken wilderness. Let it be sowed with the seed of man and beast, as a field with wheat, war will eat it up. In itself it is a miserable punishment. 2. The time: "Then." When was this war? In the time of idolatry. "They chose new gods; then." When we fight against God, we incense Him to fight against us. Yet if timely repentance step in, we escape His blows, though He hath not escaped ours. But if Israel's sins strike up alarm, Israel's God will give battle. If they choose new gods, the true God will punish. "Then was war." It is a fearful thing when God fights. 3. The place: "In the gates." This is an extreme progress of war, to come so near as the gates. If it had been in the land of their enemies, a preparation of war a great way off, the noise of war—yea, if it had come but to the coasts and invaded the borders, as the Philistines did often forage the skirts of Israel, yet it had been somewhat tolerable, for then they had but seen it only. "Thou hast shewed Thy people grievous things" (Psa. lx. 3)—shewed, but not inflicted; shaken the rod, but not scourged us. But here war is come to their thresholds, yea, to the heart of the land, to defy them in the very gates. And now they more than hear or see it; they feel it. You now see the punishment. Happy are we that cannot judge the terrors of war but by report, that never saw our towns and cities burning, our houses rifled, our temples spoiled. We have been strangers to this misery in passion, let us not be so in compassion. Let us think we have seen these calamities with our neighbours' eyes, and felt them through their sides. III. We now come to the FORLORN HOPE: "Was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel?" Was there? There was not.

This question is a plain negative. Here is the want of help; great misery, but no remedy; not a spear to offend, no, not a shield to defend. War, and war in the gates, and yet neither offensive nor defensive weapon! It takes away all, both present possession and future possibility; help and hope. You see now all the parts of the affliction: the alarm in sin, the battle in war, and the forlorn hope in the want of remedy. Two useful observations may hence be deduced—1. That war at some times is just and necessary; indeed, just when it is necessary: as here. For shall it come to the gates, and shall we not meet it? Yea, shall we not meet it before it come near the gates? There is, then, a season when war is good and lawful. Now there are two cautions observable in the justness of wars—(1) That they be undertaken upon just and warrantable cause. That they be prosecuted with an honest mind. The cause must be just. (*a*) The peace of the people; for we must aim by war to make way for peace. We must not desire truce to this end, that we may gather force for an unjust war; but we desire a just war that we may settle a true peace. (*b*) The health and safety of our country: some must be endangered that all may not be destroyed. (*c*) The glory of the kingdom; and that is, the gospel of Jesus Christ. Wars for God are called God's battles. The destruction of their cities that revolt from God to idols, and the whole spoil, is for the Lord; it is the Lord's battle and the Lord's spoil (Deut. xiii. 16). (2) The next caution, after a good ingression, is to be sure of a good prosecution. We say of the surgeon that he should have a lady's hand and a lion's heart; but the Christian soldier should have a lady's heart and a lion's hand. I mean, though he deal valiant blows, yet not destroy without compassion. 2. The other inference that may hence be deduced is this, that munition and arms should at all times be in readiness. Wise men in fair weather repair their houses against winter storms; the ant labours in harvest that she may feast at Christmas. Be long in preparing for war, that thou mayest overcome with more speed. A long preparation makes a short and quick victory. I have held you long in the battle; it is now high time to sound a retreat. But as I have spoken much of Israel's affliction, so give me leave to speak one word of the prophetess's affection, and of this only by way of exhortation: "My heart is set on the governors of Israel, that offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless ye the Lord." Here is the subject in which this affection resides and the object on which this affection reflects. The subject wherein it abides is the heart—a great zeal of love. Not only the affection of the heart, but the heart of affection: "My heart is set." The object on which it reflects is double, man and God; the excellent creature, and the most excellent Creator; the men of God, and the God of men. Upon men: "My heart is towards the governors of Israel, that offered themselves willingly among the people." Upon God: "Bless ye the Lord." Among men two sorts are objected to this love: superiors in the first place, inferiors in the latter. To the commanders primarily, but not only; for if they offered themselves willingly among the people, as we read it, then certainly the people also willingly offered themselves, as the other translations read it, "Those that were willing amongst the people." 1. To the governors of our Israel; that they offer for themselves willingly to these military designs, not on compulsion. His brows deserve no wreathed coronet that is enforced. Come with a willing mind. In every good work there must be cheerfulness in the affection and carefulness in the action. God loves a cheerful giver; so thou gainest no small thing by it, but even the love of God. "Whatsoever good thing thou doest," saith Augustine, "do it cheerfully and willingly, and thou doest it well." You that have the places of government, offer willingly your hands, your purses, yourselves, to this noble exercise. Your good example shall hearten others. 2. Now for you that are the materials of all this, let me say to you without flattery, Go forth with courage in the fear of God, and the Lord be with you. Preserve unity among yourselves, lest as in a town on fire, whilst all good hands are helping to quench it, thieves are most busy to steal booties; so whilst you contend, murmur, or repine one at the honour of another, that subtle thief, Satan, through the crack of your divisions, step in, and steal away your peace. Offer yourselves willingly; and being offered, step not back. Remember that it is base for a soldier to fly. And remember always the burden of this song, which everything that hath breath must sing, "Bless ye the Lord." (*T. Adams.*)

Delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water.—*Songs of deliverance:*—I. Our text tells us of WELLS CLEARED FROM THE FOE, and speaks of those who "are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water." 1. We thank God that we who are children of the Most High have wells to go to.

The world is a wilderness, say what we will of it. "This is not our rest; it is polluted." Our great inexhaustible well is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is, indeed, the great "deep that lieth under," the "deep that coucheth beneath," the secret spring and source from which the crystal streams of life flow, through the wells of instrumentality and ordinance. "All my fresh springs are in Thee." Whenever we come to the Lord Jesus Christ, we drink and are refreshed. No thirst can abide where He is. Arising out of this greatest fountain, we have wells from which we draw the waters of comfort. First there is this book, this golden book, this book of God, the Word of God, with its thousands of promises, suitable to every case, applicable to all seasons. So it is also with the well of ordinances—baptism and the Lord's Supper. I must not forget the mercy-seat. What a well that is to the Christian when he can draw nigh unto God with true heart! It is a glorious thing to have such a well as that in the family, where, in prayer with the children, you can bring all the necessities of the household before God. Let us never give up that well. But, as for private prayer, this world were drear indeed if we could not pour out our sorrows into our Father's ear. Over and above this, every form of fellowship with Jesus, wrought in us by the Spirit, is a well of salvation. He is our dear companion, our ever present help in time of trouble. 2. Thus have I mentioned some of the wells. Now, concerning them all, it may be said, that they can never be stopped up by our foes. If outward ordinances be stopped, yet the great deep that lieth under will find a vent somewhere. 3. Moreover, as they cannot be stopped, so neither can they be taken away from us. They are ours by covenant engagements; they are guaranteed to us by the solemn league of the Eternal Three; and none of these covenant blessings shall be wrested from the heirs of life, who are heirs of all things in Christ Jesus. 4. Though these fountains cannot be stopped up or taken away, yet we can be molested in coming near to them. It seems that archers and wells frequently go together. It was the blessing of Joseph—"Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall." But what next? "The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him." And so in the text: here are wells, but there is the noise of archers, which greatly disturbs those who go to draw water. I think you know what the noise of archers has been to you when you have tried to draw water. Years ago, with some of us, our sins were the archers that shot at us when we would fain come to Christ and drink of His salvation. When we bowed the knee in prayer a fiery arrow would dart into our hearts—"How dare you pray? God heareth not sinners!" When we read the Word of God another barbed shaft would be shot against us—"What hast thou to do with God's Word? There can be no promise there for such as thou art." I thank God, when our faith is in exercise, and our hope is clear, we can see our interest in Christ; we come to Him just as we came at first, and cast ourselves wholly upon him. Then we no longer fear the archers, but are rid of every fear. I should not wonder if another band of archers has sometimes attacked you when you have been at the wells, namely, your cares. Dear mother, the thought of the children at home has frequently disturbed your devotions in the assembly of the saints. Good friend, engaged in business, you do not always find it easy to put a hedge between Saturday and Sunday. The cares of the week will stray into the sacred enclosure of the day of rest, and thus the cruel archers worry you. It is well to be able to cast all our cares on Him who careth for us, and thus, by an act of faith in our heavenly Father, to be delivered from the noise of these archers. II. THE SONGS BY THE WELL. As when the people came to the wells of old they were wont to talk with one another if all was peaceful, so when we come up to the ordinances of God's house, and enjoy fellowship with Jesus, we should not spend our time in idle chat, but we should rehearse the works of the Lord. Around all the wells, whichever they may be, of which we drink, let our conversation be concerning Christ and His dying love; concerning the Holy Spirit and His conquering power; concerning the providence of God and its goodness and its faithfulness; and then, as we wend our way to our different homes, let us go with music in our hearts, and music on our lips, to take music to our household, each man and woman magnifying the name of the Lord. Did you observe carefully what it was they sang of?—"The acts of the Lord." But there is an adjective appended, "The righteous acts of the Lord." Righteousness is that attribute which the carnal man fears, but he who sees the righteousness of God satisfied by the atonement of Christ is charmed even by the severe aspect of God dressed as a judge. Then, if you observe, it was "the righteous acts of the Lord toward His people." Yes, the very marrow of the gospel lies in special, discriminating, distinguishing grace. Note with care that the works

which are to be rehearsed are done towards the inhabitants of the villages of Israel. Does not this suggest that we ought frequently to magnify the Lord's choice favour and tender indulgence towards the least and feeblest of His family? III. The text says, "Then shall the people of the Lord GO DOWN TO THE GATES," by which several things may be intended. 1. When the people of God are altogether delivered from their sins, and their cares, and their troubles, by the great redemption of the Lord Jesus and the power of His Spirit, then they enjoy great liberty. The liberty of the man of the world is liberty to commit evil without restraint; the liberty of a child of God is to walk in holiness without hindrance. When the believer's ways are enlarged, he delights to run in the statutes of the Lord; obedience is freedom to the Lord's servant. It is a most glorious liberty which a man possesses when he is no longer in bondage to men, to smart under their threats or to fatten in their smiles. Glorious was that ancient father who threw back the threatenings of his enemies, and laughed them to scorn. 2. To go down to the gates, however, means something else, for citizens went down to the gates to exercise authority and judgment. He that is in Christ discerneth spirits, and separateth between the excellent and the reprobate. "The spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man." Instead of being judged and following others, they who love God become the leaders in right, and are as God's mouth rebuking iniquity. 3. To go down to the gates signified also to go forth to war. When a Christian man is saved, he is not content with his own safety, he longs to see others blessed. He can now go out of the gates to attack the foe who once held him in bondage, and therefore he girds on his weapon. When will the Church of God be inflamed by the sacred desire of carrying the war for Christ into the enemy's territory? (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The noise of archers in the places of drawing water*:—I. THESE WORDS MAKE INTELLIGIBLE WHAT HAS BEEN CALLED THE SAVAGE ACT OF JAEL IN KILLING SISERA, AND THE FIERCE WORDS WITH WHICH DEBORAH PRAISES THE ACT. We see the place of drawing water—the well belonging to some little town or village. Thither in the still summer evening come the women and children. The men are absent at the wars. The women come to draw water for household and flock. As they wait their turn, the elder women talk together of their common cares and interests. The fair young maidens group together apart for the merry jest or confidential intercourse. Amongst them, moving in and out, are the laughing, bright-eyed children. What a pretty picture it makes—pretty, peaceful, glad! And then suddenly the whole is changed. The cruel, hated Canaanite is at hand. "The noise of archers" is heard. The mothers fly to guard the little ones, some of whom are laid low by the arrows. In the confusion the band sweeps down upon the group of fair maidens. The brightest and youngest and most beautiful are taken to be the slaves of the tyrant conquerors. Oh, who wonders now at Jael's cruelty and Deborah's vindictive triumph? It was not because the fair gardens were laid waste, the homes burned, the cattle and household treasures carried off, that these women so hated the oppressors; but because in the division of the spoil there would always fall "to every man a damsel or two," each the bright, sweet flower of some home, to be degraded, spoiled, trampled down, and brought to shame. We from our lofty standpoint, in the very midst of the full light of Christ's gospel—we who have learned to be patient, long-suffering, forgiving, tender-hearted—may be able to condemn them. They lived in a darker age; they had not our advantages. And yet I sometimes think that if we fully realised what that twenty years of mighty oppression must have been, how the hearts of the people will have burned with indignation at the cruelties and abominations they had to witness, we should be forced to acknowledge that Jael and Deborah would have been either more or less than women if they had acted otherwise. Deborah's song is a thanksgiving to God for deliverance. The one point she wishes to be ever remembered is that the victory was of God alone. II. THERE IS EVER GOING ON AROUND US THE GREAT BATTLE OF GOOD AGAINST EVIL, IN WHICH EACH OF US IS CALLED TO TAKE OUR PART. He who does not hate the evil with earnest hatred, who rests in selfish indolence like Asher, who lets his searchings of heart and all his religious purpose end in talk like Reuben, who is indifferent and lukewarm like Meroz, he must needs fall under the scathing curse of those who come not to the help of the Lord against the mighty. We are all bound to range ourselves on the side of the good; to fight bravely for it; if need be, to suffer or to die for it. Again, as Sisera fell at last, so will all God's enemies fall for ever one day. III. "The noise of archers in the places of drawing water"—that is to say, THE ATTACK OF THE ENEMY UPON THOSE WHO ONLY SEEK FOR PEACE, AS THEY GO ABOUT THE INNOCENT EMPLOYMENT OF DAILY LIFE. How this makes

us think of one great mystery of temptation. How depressing and terrifying to many a poor soul! "I began the day with prayer not to be led into temptation; I resolved to be so careful. I was careful, and then all at once in my work it came. I was not thinking of it, till I found myself wounded with the poisoned arrows of temper, lust, selfishness, sloth, avarice, or pride." More mysterious still, even amid our religious duties, the enemy can make his deadly onslaught—the distraction, the vain thought, the cruel doubt, even the blasphemous suggestion, come whistling like the deadly arrow, striking us back and wounding us, and marking us, as we think, for death. Well, all this is at least no difficulty to us who believe. The arrows do not come by chance. An enemy has done this. Whilst the war lasts, he is to be hated, avoided with watchful care. But there is deliverance. Even now the victory has been won, and protection assured, and none need fear the arrows who are willing to dwell under the defence of the Most High. And there shall be a hereafter, when the noise of archers shall be no longer heard; when we shall have our noble work assigned to us, such work as God has for His saints to do; when we shall go about the work in perfect security; when we shall rehearse one to another the righteous acts of the Lord who has wrought mightily for the deliverance of His people. (*R. H. Parr, M.A.*)

Ver. 12-22. **Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive.**—*Magnificat:*—I. First, then, A STIRRING UP OF ALL OUR POWERS TO PRAISE GOD, according to the words of the holy woman in the text, "Awake, awake"—repeated yet again—"Awake, awake." 1. What is there that we need to awaken if we would praise God? I reply, we ought to arouse all the bodily powers. Our flesh is sluggish; we have been busy with the world, our limbs have grown fatigued, but there is power in Divine joy to arouse even the body itself, to make the heavy eyelids light, to reanimate the drowsy eye, and quicken the weary brain. We should call upon our bodies to awake, especially our tongue, "the glory of our frame." Let it put itself in tune like David's harp of old. Surely we should call on all our mental powers to awake. Wake up, my memory, and find matter for the song. Tell what God has done for me in days gone by. Awake, my judgment, and give measure to the music. Come forth, my understanding, and weigh His loving-kindness in scales, and His goodness in the balances. See if thou canst count the small dust of His mercies. See if thou canst understand the riches unsearchable which He hath given to thee in that unspeakable gift of Christ Jesus my Lord. Awake, my imagination, and dance to the holy melody. Gather pictures from all worlds. Bid sun and moon stay in their courses, and join in thy new song. But especially let us cry to all the graces of our spirit—"Awake." Wake up, my love, for thou must strike the key-note and lead the strain. Wake up, my hope, and join hands with thy sister—love; and sing of blessings yet to come. Sing of my dying hour, when He shall be with me on my couch. Sing of the rising morning, when my body shall leap from its tomb into her Saviour's arms! Sing of the expected advent, for which thou lookest with delight! And oh, my soul, sing of that heaven which He has gone before to prepare for thee. And thou, my faith, awake also. Sing of the promise sure and certain. Then let us wake up the energy of all those powers—the energy of the body, the energy of the mind, the energy of the spirit. You know what it is to do a thing coldly, weakly. As well might we not praise at all. You know also what it is to praise God passionately—to throw energy into all the song, and so to exult in His name. So do ye, each one of you, this day. 2. But you say unto me: "Why and wherefore should we this day awake and sing unto our God?" There be many reasons; and if your hearts be right, one may well satisfy. Come, ye children of God, and bless His dear name; for doth not all nature around you sing? If you were silent, you would be an exception to the universe. But, believer, shall not thy God be praised? I ask thee. Shall not thy God be praised? When men behold a hero, they fall at his feet and worship him. Garibaldi emancipates a nation, and lo, they bow before him and do him homage. And Thou, Jesus, the Redeemer of the multitudes of Thine elect, shalt Thou have no song? Shalt Thou have no triumphal entry into our hearts? Shall Thy name have no glory? Thou sayest, believer, "Why should I praise Him?" Let me ask thee a question too. Is it not heaven's employment to praise Him? And what can make earth more like heaven than to bring down from heaven the employment of glory, and to be occupied with it here! Besides, Christian, dost thou not know that it is a good thing for thee to praise thy God? Mourning weakens thee, doubts

destroy thy strength; thy groping among the ashes makes thee of the earth, earthy. Arise, for praise is pleasant and profitable to thee. "The joy of the Lord is our strength." But I ask you one other question, believer. Thou sayest, "Why should I awake this morning to sing unto my God?" I reply to thee, "Hast thou not a cause? Hath He not done great things for thee, and art thou not glad thereof?" 3. "But," saith one, "when shall I do this? When shall I praise my God?" I answer, "Praise ye the Lord, all His people, at all times, and give thanks at every remembrance of Him." 4. Yet once more, you reply to me, "But how can I praise my God?" I will be teacher of music to thee, and may the Comforter be with me. Wilt thou think this morning how great are thy mercies. Thou art not blind, nor deaf, nor dumb; thou art not a lunatic; thou art not decrepit; thou art not vexed with piercing pains; thou art not going down to the grave; thou art not in torments, not in hell. And is not this a theme for praise? Oh, must not you praise him, ye chief of sinners, whose natures have been changed, whose hearts have been renewed! II. "ARISE, BARAK, AND LEAD THY CAPTIVITY CAPTIVE, THOU SON OF ABINOAM." You understand the exact picture here. Barak had routed Sisera, Jabin's captain, and all his hosts. She now exhorts Barak to celebrate his triumph. This is a picture which is often used in Scripture. Christ is said to have led captivity captive when He ascended on high. He led principalities and powers captive at His chariot-wheels. But here is a picture for us—not concerning Christ, but concerning ourselves. We are exhorted to-day to lead captivity captive. Come up, come up, ye grim hosts of sins once my terror and dismay. Come up, ye sins, come up, for ye are prisoners now; ye are bound in fetters of iron, nay, more than this, ye are utterly slain, consumed, destroyed; you have been covered with Jesu's blood; ye have been blotted out by His mercy. Arise, celebrate your triumph, oh ye people of God! Arise, my trials; ye have been very great and very numerous; ye came against me as a great host, and ye were tall and strong like the sons of Anak. Oh, my soul, thou hast trodden down strength; by the help of our God have we leaped over a wall; by His power have we broken through the troops of our troubles, our difficulties, and our fears! Arise, and let us lead captive all our temptations. You have been foully tempted to the vilest sins. Satan has shot a thousand darts at you, and hurled his javelin multitudes of times; bring out the darts and snap them before his eyes, for he has never been able to reach your heart. Come, break the bow and cut the spear in sunder; burn the chariot in the fire. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *God's cause carried on by human agency*:—I. THE CAUSE OF TRUE RELIGION IS EMINENTLY AND EMPHATICALLY THE CAUSE OF GOD. 1. It was His cause; for—(1) It had the sanction of His express command. (2) God's hand was in it. 2. We have in view, under the blessing of God, the evangelisation of all mankind; and this is unquestionably the cause of God. (1) For God has commanded that the evangelisation of the world should be attempted by His people. (2) For God's honour is greatly involved in the success of it. Idolatry, in all its various forms, is a direct attack on God's supremacy and sovereignty. (3) In this cause we have the promise of God's presence and blessing. II. IN CARRYING ON THIS GREAT WORK GOD HAS BEEN PLEASED TO DEMAND AND TO BLESS HUMAN EFFORTS. In the case before us the power of God was supernaturally exerted. The stars in their courses, the swelling of the river, the thunder and the tempest, were all effects of supernatural interposition. But, even in that age of miracles, these supernatural means were not intended to supersede those means which were ordinary. Deborah and Barak exerted themselves to the utmost; and, with many others, were required to come up to the help of the Lord, to the help of the God of miracles. And similar is the case as to the conversion of the world to Christianity. God "gave some, apostles; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." It was by the instrumentality of holy, enlightened, zealous missionaries that our own country first received the glad tidings of salvation; it was through their agency that our rude ancestors were induced to change Thor and Woden, and all their bloody rites and awful abominations, for the simple and holy truths of the gospel. And the work we have to do must be done by the same agency. Ambassadors must be sent to the heathen, and they must declare God's message, trusting in His power and help. This is the established order of God, that they who love His cause should help it by their various instrumentality. III. THE CALLS OF GOD TO ENGAGE IN THIS CAUSE EXPERIENCE A VERY VARIOUS RECEPTION FROM THOSE TO WHOM THEY ARE ADDRESSED. 1. Some are hearty in the cause of God. 2. Others cherish a spirit of indolence and carelessness. IV. GOD TAKES ESPECIAL NOTICE OF THE CONDUCT OF HIS PEOPLE IN REFERENCE

TO THE DEMAND MADE UPON THEM FOR THIS CAUSE; AND HE MAKES AN IMPORTANT DISTINCTION IN HIS CONDUCT TOWARDS THOSE WHO COME FORWARD, OR REFUSE TO COME FORWARD, IN HIS CAUSE. Those who refused to come forward are recorded as infamous, and are covered with everlasting disgrace; those who came forward are mentioned with distinguished honour, and were no doubt blessed ever afterwards. For God will be no man's debtor; He may make us wait for payment, but, such is His condescension and grace, He will be in no man's debt. Come up to the help of the Lord, and you shall have the approbation of Almighty God. Come up to the help of the Lord, and you will gain the esteem and good wishes of your fellow-Christians and ministers, who, when they see their humble efforts are not unfruitful, but that you are becoming complete in every good word and work, will gladly spend and be spent in your service. Come up to the help of the Lord against His enemies, and you shall have the increasing influence of God to render beneficial all the means you enjoy. Come up to the help of the Lord, and your happiness shall increase, your consolations shall abound—you shall be blessed in the Lord. Come up to the help of the Lord against the mighty, and you shall have the satisfaction of knowing that your labour is not in vain. For the Word of the Lord shall not return unto Him void. You shall reap in due season, if you faint not. (*J. Bunting, M.A.*) By the watercourses of Reuben there were great resolves of heart.—*The apology of the non-fighters*:—On account of their unfaithfulness the children of Israel were oppressed by Jabin for twenty years; then the oppressed people cried unto God, and Deborah and Barak were called to lead them to freedom. In this great song Deborah brings out the characteristics of the several tribes at the national crisis. She sets forth how some of them promptly entered upon the struggle for liberty; how others were miserably indifferent and unpatriotic; and in the text a vivid stroke or two shows that whilst Reuben was deeply interested and agitated by what was transpiring, he refrained from taking any part in the actual fight. "By the watercourses of Reuben there were great searchings of heart," and that was all. "Great were the debates," "great were the resolves"; but they never proceeded to action. I. The text is a rebuke to the THEORIST. The Reubenites were the thinkers of their age. They were not indifferent to public questions; they recognised the problems of their day, and mentally wrestled with them; but they drew the line at action. All action seemed so unsatisfactory that they could not persuade themselves to reduce their splendid patriotic theories to experiment. So to-day there is a tribe of idealists. They are full of thought, rich in ideas, masterly in systems; but they find it impossible to pass from reflection to effort. Thought is large, action is insignificant; thought is swift, action is tardy; thought is triumphant, action is full of interruption, shortcoming, and failure; and so the theorist abides in his arm-chair watching pictures in the fire. To follow the facts and movements of the world as a supreme game of chess delights the philosophic mind, but to interest ourselves in any commonplace practical endeavour to aid the needy is voted a belittling vulgarism. Amiel says, "Reverie is the Sunday of the mind"; and the whole life of some men is a Sunday, they know no working-days. They deplore personal defects, yet they do not bravely take themselves to task and struggle into a better life; they ponder social evils, but nothing comes of the intellectual agitation; they have their ideas and aspirations concerning the heathen world, yet they take no part in missionary enterprise. Their whole life is spent in observation, reasoning, and soliloquy. This will not do. Deborah scorns the idle theorists, and their position is always ignoble. We account men meritorious as they master the difficult conditions of human life; society has no prizes for mere dreamers. He who gives a cup of cold water to a thirsty soul is infinitely better than the idealist whose sparkling fountains and flowing rivers are mere mirages of the brain. We must have thought, theory, programme; we must have the dreamer, the philosopher, the debater, only the pondering of the mind must be succeeded by the labour of the hands. When Cavour died, Elizabeth B. Browning wrote: "That noble soul who meditated and made Italy has gone to the diviner country." "Meditated and made." It is all there. We must meditate and make. Not that we can by any means realise all our dream, but we must strive thereunto. Some bit of reality must testify to the genuineness of our great thought and purpose. II. The text is a rebuke to the CRITICAL. The Reubenites were the critics of the age. "Great were the debates." They read the minutes of the last meeting; they submitted a resolution as to what might be done; then they ably discussed the whole situation; the ornaments of

debate shone out; an amendment was proposed that nothing be done, the vote was taken, the amendment was declared to be carried by a large majority, and the assembly retired to lunch. And one can easily imagine the course of the debate. Some would object to a movement led by a woman; others would question the qualifications of Barak; many would think that it was not the psychological moment; and those with a flavour of military genius would doubt the plan of campaign. The critical tribe is with us still. We have a host of people who are interested in the great struggle of light and darkness, but whose interest ends with information, discussion, and opinion. We have such critics outside the Church. They are prepared, at five minutes' notice, to discuss any religious, moral, social, or political question; yet they make no practical effort whatever to grapple with the evils they dissect. Especially do these critics love to scourge the Church. How well they can describe the evil! How clearly they can see what ought to be done! How rough they are upon the blunders of philanthropists and evangelists! But all ends there; they spend no time, or gold, or blood in any form of practical amelioration. How false is the position of the critic, and how ignoble the whole spirit of barren criticism! How contemptible the carpet knight lecturing the scarred heroes of the battlefield! How ridiculous the musical amateur exposing the faults of Handel and Mozart! How despicable the scribbler of a day making merry over the shortcoming of literary masterpieces! "Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds?" is the derisive question of Deborah. The Reubenites thought themselves superior persons, but the singer suggests a cutting contrary. A love of ease partly explained their conduct. They liked the shepherd's lute better than the war-trumpet with its toils and sufferings. The love of gain also explained the absence of the Reubenites from battle. And they were cowards. There was not a spear in Israel, and Jabin had thousands of chariots of iron. Deborah pours scorn on the windy orators. The day is coming, too, when God will pour scorn upon the phrase-makers. He will laugh at the laughers, criticise the critics, scorn the scorners. Let us act. "God's words are things," says Luther; and unless we strive to make our words things they become falsities, vanities, mockeries. One of the great heroes of to-day is the hero of the paper-knife, the critic who flourishes his wooden weapon as if it were some famous blade of victory. The poorest plough that will scratch the ground, the most ramshackle basket that will carry a little seed, the rustiest hook that will serve for a sickle, is better than the paper-knife. A drop of blood is more than a vat of ink or a world of talk. The poorest methods of service, the homeliest instruments of practical endeavour, count for far more in the sight of God than a magazine of polished and attenuated shafts which neither smite nor bite. Let us not waste life in opinion, discussion, or criticism, but deny ourselves in daily efforts seeking some real good. Our Master did not redeem us by words, but by tears and blood; and the best thing for us is with fewest words to take up our cross and follow Him. III. The text is a rebuke to the SENTIMENTALIST. There were "great searchings of heart." The Reubenites were men of fine feeling, of intense emotion; only the emotion evaporated when the resolution was duly entered upon the minutes. A large circle of these sentimentalists survive. They pride themselves on the depth and tenderness of their feeling, yet their feeling never compels action and sacrifice. They feel for the poor, the ignorant, the suffering, the fallen, and most for themselves. In prayers, sermons, hymns, and sacraments the fountains of the deep are broken up without leaving any fertilising stream. It is really a fearful thing that sentiment should be so constantly wasted that the very word itself comes at last to be regarded as expressing something unreal. Sympathy is the richest element in the human heart, and it is an awful loss to society that so much of it should be vainly lavished on unsubstantial scenes and images, on airy nothings. We talk of the loss of force in Niagara, but there is a far more terrible loss of precious energy in the unavailing stream of feeling which passes away in imaginative moods. If we could harness the Niagara of human sympathy, and set it to work in educating the ignorant, in helping the helpless, in nursing the sick, in reclaiming the fallen, what gracious revolutions would be worked in a day! Feeling is worth nothing if it bear no tangible fruit. Our Master wept, but He also bled. (*W. L. Watkinson.*) **Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds?**—*On shirking duty:* —There is a touch of scorn, as well as of reproach, in the question of the prophetess. And the question is one which, in the spirit of it, may be addressed to thousands to-day. There is a great battle now going on in the world—the battle between truth and error, right and wrong, love and misery. The conflict involves

self-denial; and we have simply no right to "abide in the sheepfolds." I. WE HAVE NO RIGHT TO SACRIFICE DUTY TO COMFORT. We are all tempted thus to prefer our own ease to the doing of our duty. There are multitudes, indeed, who will sacrifice comfort for the sake of some selfish end: their love of money, or of fame, or of pleasure, will lead them to take upon themselves a large amount of toil and trouble. But when it is a question of simple duty there are many who will shirk such duties rather than sacrifice their own personal ease. They would like to do good in the world; but it is too much trouble! Many a man shirks the duties of citizenship on the plea that he has no ambition to distinguish himself in public life. He finds his fireside very comfortable; the bosom of his family is his "sheepfold." Others shirk their duty to the Church and the cause of Christ simply through their love of selfish ease; they will not take the trouble to "do good as they have opportunity." II. WE HAVE NO RIGHT TO SACRIFICE DUTY TO PEACE. It is right that you should shrink from the din of controversy and strife, and that you should prefer to live in concord with your neighbours; but it is wrong that, on this account, you should withhold your testimony and your influence from the cause of truth and justice. III. WE HAVE NO RIGHT TO SACRIFICE DUTY TO GAIN. When Christ calls you into the conflict against the world's evil, when He calls you to protest by your own example against all dishonesty and falsehood, then you must be prepared to sacrifice some of the profits which fall to the lot of less scrupulous men, and you must be content, if necessary, with a smaller sheepfold. (*T. C. Finlayson.*)

The divisions of Reuben.—*The attitude of Reuben:*—Could such a thing as actual neutrality have been possible under the circumstances, the men of Reuben would have represented such an attitude. But under the circumstances it was impossible. No member of the favoured race could be actually neutral when his brethren were struggling for liberty and life. Not to assist was to oppose. To look on coldly was to help the foe. They saw their brethren gathering on the opposite bank. They heard the sound of the trumpet and the noise of war. Would they not arise and join them? Could they be indifferent when the very existence of their nation was at stake? But against this higher impulse had to be set considerations of worldly profit and loss. "Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleatings of the flocks?" It was this fatal sound that decided them. It was with them as it so often is with us—the nearer the temptation, the more powerful it becomes. Had they marshalled themselves for war, and left their homes, the bleatings of the sheepfold would never have reached their ears, and the higher impulse would have prevailed; but as they lingered vacillating by the sheepfolds, the nearer attractions of home and prosperity proved too strong. The great opportunity passed away, leaving an indelible stain on the history of the tribe. "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel." Were they happy? A double-minded man is never happy. Unstable in all his ways, he can neither enjoy the world nor God. They might escape danger, but they could not escape the "great searchings of heart." Their conscience smote them, even while their worldly prosperity continued. They lost the power to enjoy what they had sacrificed their character to retain. Ah, how many Reubens have we still in the Church of Christ!—men who make fair promises under the influence of a momentary excitement or a higher emotion, but whose hearts are not fully surrendered to God. They grasp after the good things of the world, and love them. They seek the good opinion of their fellow-men, and love it. If a Christianity can be discovered which shall cost them nothing, which shall not even lower them in the estimation in which men of the world hold them, such a Christianity they are ready to accept; but the Christianity of the manger and of the Cross, of Gethsemane and Calvary, they shirk from with ill-concealed aversion. (*W. Hay Aitken, M.A.*) *Divisions should be avoided:*—How strong it makes a family when all the sisters and brothers stand together, and what an awful wreck when they disintegrate, quarrelling about a father's will and making the surrogate's office horrible with their wrangle! If you only knew it, your interests are identical. Of all the families of the earth that ever stood together, perhaps the most conspicuous is the family of the Rothschilds. As Meyer Anselm Rothschild was about to die in 1812 he gathered his children about him, Anselm, Nathan, Charles, and James, and made them promise that they would always be united on "'Change." Obeying that injunction, they have been the mightiest commercial power on earth, and at the raising or lowering of their sceptre nations have risen or fallen. That illustrates how much on a large scale, and for selfish purposes, a united family may achieve. But suppose that, instead of a magnitude of dollars as the object. .

be doing good and making salutary impression and raising this sunken world, how much more ennobling! Sister, you do your part, and brother will do his part. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) **Why did Dan remain in ships?**—*Why did Dan remain in ships?*—I dare say Dan could have given what might have seemed to himself a very sensible answer. Surely it would never have done for Dan to lose his commerce. Surely it was most important that he should retain his mercantile position. To leave his ships and go to fight the Lord's battle in the field would have been to turn his back upon his most obvious interests. He had no men to spare; no time to spare; no money to spare. Far too busy were the Danites to think of their brethren in the field. It mattered not that national liberty and religion might be lost so long as Dan retained his ships. Go to the streets of one of our great towns, and you will see the same thing re-enacted. Men running to and fro as though life were at stake in every effort, toiling at their business all day long, and when night comes too wearied to think of spiritual things. They have too much to do—are far too busy to think of the business of life! . . . Why! does he not know that his ships are doomed sooner or later to fearful shipwreck? Dost thou not know, O lover of the world, that the day must come when thou and thy darling idols will have to part? What profit on thy dying bed to remember that thou hast laboured here for that which thou canst not carry with thee? Thou hast enlarged thy barns, increased thy merchandise, raised thy family in the world, and left thy children in prosperity; and now the sentence falls upon thy trembling soul, "Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward." Poor consolation under the sentence of doom to remember that thy coffers are full while thy soul was starved. (*W. Hay Aitken, M.A.*) *Why did Dan remain in ships?*—Early in this century a minister in England, who has since spent many years in the foreign missionary field, was requested to preach, at a meeting of some of his brethren, on the too prevalent disposition among professing Christians to inactivity in religion. Somewhat to their surprise, he read as his text, "Why did Dan remain in ships?" After explaining the text in its connection, and that the Danites resembled many Christians at present, he showed their inactivity to be—1. Unreasonable. They knew the state of the country, its dangers, and the assurance of victory;—how unreasonable that a whole tribe should under such circumstances remain inactive. 2. It was injurious. By their inactivity the hands of their brethren were weakened, an opportunity was given to the enemy to triumph, and personal injury was sustained. 3. It was sinful. The command of God was disregarded; they availed not themselves of opportunities to be useful, and forbore to destroy their enemies. **That jeoparded their lives unto the death in the high places of the field.**—*Life jeoparded in heroic service:*—The late Wilmot Brooke, the pioneer missionary to the Soudan, who died on March 19th, anticipated his swiftly-approaching end. At the Church Missionary House just before starting on his last expedition in May, 1891, he remarked: "I have five times had African fever of the most deadly kind. No one is ever known to have recovered seven times from this fever. You must expect that some of us will fall; I shall not be surprised if my call comes in six months. Still I am determined to go. Friends tell me what madness it is to run such risks. But when men were called to storm Delhi and Lucknow, they cheerfully came forward, knowing that death was certain. The strongholds of heathenism and Mohammedanism can only be stormed by acting for God in the same spirit. My action is not the outcome of rashness on my part. I am going after the calmest and fullest consideration." **The stars in their courses fought against Sisera.**—*Sisera no match for the stars:*—All things, even the stars in their courses, fight against every one who, like Sisera, puts himself in opposition to the plans of the Ruler of the universe. If you co-operate with, and act according to the laws of God, then you will in the long run prove victorious; if you do not, why then these laws will crush you. They are stronger than you. A man is powerful or powerless just in proportion as he submits to God's laws. And, first, to speak of physical laws, or those relating to matter. It is by obeying nature that we learn her secrets. A medical man in the kingdom of nature cures or kills, just in proportion as he has carefully or carelessly studied the laws of health and obeys them. By studying and making use of the physical laws of God's universe we can improve health and prolong life. On the other hand, there is no favourite of nature who can be intemperate and not suffer from ill-health, or live near bad drainage and escape fever. No matter how intellectual or even religious you may be, if you hold your hand in the fire it will certainly be

burned. A Christian is as liable to losses in his business if he does not conform to the laws of commerce, on which wealth depends, as an atheist is. Transgress God's physical laws, and even the stars in their courses fight against you. Just so there are spiritual and moral laws, by compliance with which we receive blessings, and which, if not obeyed, are as ready as the stars to fight against us. Such laws are these: "If we love one another, God dwelleth in us." "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine." Without God we can do nothing. Let us conduct ourselves in every relation and occupation of life as if we believed we were what we are—"workers together with God"—and all things must work together for good. Let us put ourselves in opposition to Him, and all things, even the stars in their courses, shall fight against us. (*E. J. Hardy, M.A.*) *The stars fought against Sisera*:—I. THE LITERAL SENSE. 1. This lesson is a song of thanksgiving. It reminds us at once of the duty of gratitude to God at all times, but especially after any great deliverance. The miracle of the cleansing of the lepers puts in a picture the rarity of thanksgiving—when ten pray, but one gives thanks. 2. Then, this song was a spontaneous outburst of praise immediately after the reception of the blessing. Thanksgiving was, as it should be, prompt. 3. The victory was ascribed to God: "Praise ye the Lord for the avenging of Israel." Thanksgiving is only possible when there is faith, when the eye of the soul penetrates beyond what are called "second causes," and traces the events of this life to the providence of God. 4. But a particular instrument which God employed for carrying out His purposes is recognised in the text: "the stars," &c. Viewed literally, what is meant by this? It is the description of some wonder wrought by God in the battle, which aided the overthrow of Jabin's host and Jabin's general. II. THE FIGURATIVE SENSE. 1. "The stars in their courses" have been supposed to represent the angels of God. 2. Warfare against evil is one part of the angels' functions. Holy Scripture recounts their military operations (Rev. xii. 7). St. Jude describes another altercation (ver. 9). Daniel relates a third (Dan. x. 13). And again, at the end of the world (1 Thess. iv. 16; 2 Thess. ii. 8), the angels "shall sever the wicked from among the just," and consign them to punishment (Matt. xiii. 49, 50). 3. We may not know how these spiritual beings "fought against Sisera," any more than we can tell how the angel of the Lord caused the pestilence in the days of David (1 Chron. xxi. 15); but we do know that angels are the ministers of God (Psa. civ. 4), and carry out His behests. 4. If the stars represent the angels of God, then, on the other hand, the victory over Sisera, and the instrument by which it was achieved, form an apt image of the overthrow of Satan's power by the Cross. III. LESSONS. 1. When this lesson is said to contain "praise of Jael's perfidy," and that from the lips of an inspired prophetess, it may be urged in reply, that it is a commendation of the brave deed of Jael and her disinterested zeal for the welfare of God's people, whilst the treachery which accompanied it was in keeping with the low moral condition of the age and person—with "the light of the times." 2. We may learn from the general subject the duty of thanksgiving, and that its fulfilment involves a belief in the doctrine of Divine providence. 3. According to the literal interpretation of the text, we are led to the conviction that even such matters as the weather may be guided by God to fulfil His purposes, and that His directing touch is effective in a region far beyond the ken of human science, which can only extend to the proximate causes of things. 4. The spiritual meaning should remind us that the angels of God assist us in our conflict with the evil one, and by Divine appointment "succour and defend us on earth"; so that, in our struggles with the power of darkness, we may take the words of the prophet as a ground of confidence, "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them" (2 Kings vi. 16). (*Canon Hutchings.*) **O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength.**—*Interposition and victory*:—I. THE INTERPOSITION BY WHICH THE SOUL TREADS DOWN ALL OPPOSITION AND GAINS THE VICTORY. It matters not how weak the creature may be if the Lord interpose. They had nothing to do but follow on: it was the Lord that took spirit out of the enemy, and that caused the enemy to err. These things remind us of what an awful thing it is to be an enemy to God—under sin, under the wrath of God, under the curse of the law, and under the powers of darkness; and all the time we are there, we are reckoned enemies, and we are under judgment. What a fearful position! and yet we are by nature unconscious of it, and unconcerned about it. Let us, then, look at these interposing stars, by which we tread down strength. But in so doing we must be careful not to forget one thing, and that is the chief thing; and that is Jesus Christ, the Morning Star. He is that

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interposing light, by whom we have the victory. But it says, "the stars in their courses." The people of God at large are called stars, but ministers especially. Hence you read of His holding the seven stars in His right hand; the seven stars are the angels or messengers of the Churches. And so I take the stars, then, if I spiritualise it, fighting against Sisera, to mean the prophets testimonially standing against the powers of darkness. II. THE VAIN ATTEMPT OF THE ENEMY TO ESCAPE. The river Kishon swept the enemy away. Many people say, "Well, I am no enemy." You are, unless you are a friend. (*James Wells.*)

Ver. 23. Curse ye Meroz . . . because they came not to the help of the Lord.—*The doom of Meroz*:—I. THE SIN OF THE MEN OF MEROZ is described in very remarkable terms, although we have grown so familiar with them as scarce perhaps to notice their strange character: "They came not to the help of the Lord." Everywhere we read of the Lord's coming to the help of man; but man coming to the help of the Lord seems strange. The Lord employs instruments for the executing of His purposes, though He needs them not. The tribes of Israel were summoned to this war, and the inhabitants of Meroz declined the summons. Well; but God had entered into marriage covenant with Israel. The kingdom of Israel was His kingdom. The interests of Israel were His interests; and He had bound up with them the glory of His own name. Accordingly it is not now said of the men of Meroz that they came not to Deborah's help, nor to Barak's help, nor even to the help of Israel, but that "they came not to the help of the Lord." 1. A little more specifically, the sin of the men of Meroz had in it unbelief—criminal distrust of the word and promise and power of the living God. No doubt it was largely cowardice that led them to refuse their aid. But whence the cowardice? They did not believe that the Canaanites could be subdued. They would keep on good terms with the oppressors to save their own heads. 2. But besides criminal unbelief—that root and strength of all other iniquities—the sin of the men of Meroz had in it a vile preference of their own ease, and fancied present interest before the authority and honour and interest of the God of Israel. 3. And thus, further, their sin was nothing less than enmity, war, against the living God. Doubtless they would be fain to say, "What have we done so much against Him? we have but sat still in our quiet homes." Aye, and therein fought against Him. Oh, there is no possible medium between the love of the adorable God and the hatred of Him—between willing, active service rendered to God and hostility, war, against Him—"He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad." 4. It was to "the help of the Lord against the mighty" they refused to come—against the mighty. Had the enemy, that is to say, been a feeble, contemptible one in numbers and strength, they might have had some plausible pretext for leaving the struggle to others. But all was in reality at stake. II. Notice THE JUDGMENT OF THE LORD AGAINST THE MEN OF MEROZ for this sin. I think there can be very little doubt that there must have been some special aggravation in the case of Meroz which has not been placed on record—perhaps its having been in the immediate neighbourhood of the field of action, together with some more emphatic treachery of dealing in its refusal of aid. Lessons: 1. First, a lesson of duty—very urgent duty. It will help to bring both the duty and the urgency of it better out if it is borne in mind that, from the fall of our race downwards, the Lord has had a controversy, so to speak—a quarrel in this fallen world—a war with mighty adversaries, Satan, sin, the world that lieth in the wicked one—His gracious purpose having all along been in that war to call a people out of the world for the glory of His own name—an innumerable multitude of all kindreds and peoples and tongues, to be "washed, and sanctified, and justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." 2. Observe a second lesson of a different character, one of precious and varied encouragement to all such as are disposed humbly, yet resolutely and prayerfully, to offer themselves to the help of the Lord against the mighty. See, for example, how He will condescend to receive and welcome your aid (ver. 9). And see the grateful mention, if I might so speak with reverence, which God makes of particular services (ver. 14). 3. Once more, we have a lesson here of solemn warning—duty, encouragement, warning. For observe that it is by no means any and every kind of help and service that will suffice to separate us from the class, and save us from the curse, of the inhabitants of Meroz. A man may come, for example, with a help so stinted and grudging as to make it quite manifest that it is but the covering up of a desire to be let alone altogether. Or he may come with a help not so stinted in the simple amount of it, yet not offered to the Lord Himself,

which is the hinge, you will carefully observe, of this whole matter, "they came not to the help of the Lord"—"Ye did it," or, "ye did it not, to Me." Assuredly, by how much the Lord has revealed His condescension and grace, in making offer to us of so marvellous a oneness of cause and interest and blessedness with Himself, by so much the more aggravated a judgment and doom must the contempt and rejection of that grace bring with it. (*C. J. Brown, D.D.*) *Co-operation in God's cause required of all*:—I. FROM THE EARLIEST PERIODS OF TIME GOD HAS BEEN GRACIOUSLY PLEASED TO PROVIDE FOR THE DELIVERANCE OF HIS PEOPLE FROM THE THRALDOM AND BONDAGE INTO WHICH THEY HAVE BEEN BROUGHT BY SIN. II. IN THE PROSECUTION OF THIS WORK JEHOVAH MEETS WITH MUCH AND MIGHTY OPPOSITION. III. THE PEOPLE OF GOD ARE REQUIRED TO CO-OPERATE WITH JEHOVAH IN REFERENCE TO HIS DESIGNS AS TO THE CHILDREN OF MEN. IV. AMONG THOSE WHO ARE THUS SUMMONED TO THE HELP OF THE LORD, THERE ARE SOME WHO DISREGARD THE CALL. V. TO WITHHOLD OUR CO-OPERATIVE AID IN REFERENCE TO THE DESIGNS OF GOD TO BRING THE WORLD FROM THE BONDAGE OF SIN TO HIS OWN BLESSED SERVICE IS MOST CRIMINAL AND DESTRUCTIVE. (*W. Roby.*) *Why was Meroz cursed?*—What had Meroz done to deserve the punishment of God? In the first place, Meroz had omitted to do a positive and plain duty. They did not join with the enemy, but they refused to help the people of God. Then again, the sin of Meroz was a sin of lukewarmness, carelessness. Supposing England to have been overrun by an hostile army. Supposing that at last, gathering all her strength to repel her enemies from her fair country, one town in an important position refused to join in the battle at a critical moment, so that the enemies of England were not crushed as we desired to see them. Surely all England would ring with words of hatred for the people that could so act. Meroz was guilty of lack of patriotism, but a lack of patriotism in the case of the children of Israel was also a lack of proper religious zeal. Well, then, in the third place, Meroz let slip an opportunity; it neglected a crisis in its life. The war led up to the gates of Meroz, the opportunity was given to them of striking a blow for God against sinners. The opportunity was refused. 1. From the conduct of the people of Meroz, then, we may take three great warnings; and in the first place a warning against sins of omission. People are apt to think a very great deal too little about sins of omission. We are all of us apt to slur over the good things which we have left undone, and to think that the only thing hateful in the sight of God or offensive to Him whom we call our heavenly Father are the gross sins which attract perhaps the observation and hatred of others, and from which our own consciences do naturally recoil. How very often do you hear a person say in a satisfied way that they have never done harm to anybody. Such persons who say that are in great danger. They seem to see no sins though there may be many in their lives; but they have forgotten altogether that the object of their own crisis, the very object of their coming into the world, was not to do no sin, but to glorify God by their lives. Neglecting prayers. When we lift up our hands to God on high and call Him our Father, when we have that mighty privilege and that great duty accorded to us and yet neglect it, is it no sin, I say, to go day by day with careless prayers, or neglected prayers, to God? Surely there is some sin in neglecting our Church and our duties of public worship. And then again, while we think of habits of evil and so forth, we are inclined not to think half enough about encouraging habits of good, doing what is right as well as avoiding what is wrong. Then again, faith—a great duty to us. Yet how many go on through life without ever troubling themselves to look into the matters of their faith, or how many dare to live on through life with a sort of lurking or lingering doubt at their hearts, which chills all their acts of devotion and makes their lives unlovely in the sight of God. The curse of God came down on Meroz; doomed to judgment was the city, not because it did that which was wrong in opposing the people of God, but because she neglected a plain duty that God had put before her plainly. 2. Then we see, in the second place, that the sin of Meroz was a sin of lukewarmness. We are warned very frequently and very earnestly in Holy Scripture about the sin of lukewarmness, not being eager to take the part of God, not being eager to proclaim ourselves His children and to show ourselves worthy of the membership of His Church. There are many warnings to this effect, notably, the character of Esau in the Old Testament. And then you remember, surely, those awful denunciations in the Book of the Revelation against the lukewarm Laodicea. We are inclined to be very hot and earnest and keen about matters of business, or about matters of pleasure, or about matters of politics, or perhaps we may even add about matters of Church partisanship. But how about true religion? Oh, we say, "Let us take

that easy. Our fathers did, perhaps, before us, why should not we? Do not let us take any trouble about that. That will come all right in the end." 3. And again, in the last place, we notice that the sin of Meroz was neglecting to seize an opportunity, letting a crisis in its history pass by without making use of it. The opportunity was given for striking a blow for God, and it was let slip by. We are in danger in this way. There are crises in every man and woman's life, crises in the lives of all of us, which God gives to us; some of very vital importance—opportunities, which may perhaps never come again, of striking some blow for God, or of gaining some great spiritual victory over the sins which beset us. It is very important to remember this. (*Cecil Hook, M.A.*) *Coming to the help of the Lord:*—1. Meroz is never again mentioned in Scripture, and its exact site is unknown. Its sin resulted in its extinction. What was that sin? (1) It was, first, an act of selfishness. The inhabitants of Meroz cared only for their own interests. The yoke of Jabin did not apparently lie so heavily upon them as upon the northern tribes. They could see no advantage to be gained for themselves by a military revolt, and they would run no risks in connection with it. (2) It was, therefore, a neglect of duty. They did not fight against their brethren, but they would not fight for them. It was a purely negative sin, a sin of omission, but it was none the less a distinct and positive "No" to the call of duty. (3) This refusal was an act of impiety. It betrayed a sad lack of patriotism and a contemptible indifference towards national freedom and honour. These miserable lovers of ease had the souls of slaves, and were unworthy of their ancestral traditions. Their indifference was, moreover, impious. It implied a disregard of God, whose worship they were bound to uphold. 2. Meroz has perished; but did none of its inhabitants escape? Have they not had a numerous progeny and become a great people spread over the face of the earth? Their descendants are not unknown among ourselves. Is there nothing in our life that corresponds to the sin of Meroz? Consider our position in relation to the gospel of Christ, and we shall see. Our Lord has summoned us to the conquest of the world. All souls are His—His by right of creation and redemption, as they should also be by willing submission. That submission is hindered by men's ignorance and error, by reckless indifference and deliberate sin, by calculating worldliness not less than by unbridled self-indulgence. Against these foes the whole force of the gospel is directed. Every man, be he learned or ignorant, an Englishman or a Hindoo, is interested in that fact, and needs the help of which it is at once the pledge and the source. Christ, and Christ only, is the Saviour of the world; even as, on the other hand, every man belongs unto Christ, and is bound by the most stringent and absolute obligation to Him who is Lord of all. Christ comes not to this conquest alone, but as "Captain of the Lord's host." He summons His people to His side, gives them spear and shield, and equips them for the fight. We have, of course, the power of refusal. Our Lord asks for willing service, and will have no pressed men in the ranks. You can escape this service if you are so minded, meeting Christ's call and your brother's need with a flat denial. Multitudes do so fail, and why? 1. Some are influenced by a false intellectualism. Let us, as far as it is in our power, know the best that has been thought and said, come in contact with master minds, understand their working, see things as with their eyes, and catch the glow of their enthusiasm. To gaze on the fair forms of truth and beauty, to listen to the harmonies of perfect music, is a pure delight, and imparts an added charm to life. But such an aim touches only a small part of our duty. The knowledge of Christ—the crown of all science—can only be acquired by the obedience of faith and love; while no amount of self-culture or of æsthetic worship will justify us in ignoring the sins and sorrows of mankind, or in neglecting the opportunities we possess of meeting the terrible pressure of human need. 2. Other men are absorbed in business. Their main aim is to get on in the world, to become rich and prosperous, to make good bargains, and to ensure at any rate a steady increase of their capital or their savings. Coal, steam, and iron have their devout, if not their disinterested, worshippers. Money, which is designed to be a means, becomes an end in itself—committed to men in trust, it is hoarded or used as if it were their own, and they do nothing to rescue the heathen, because they are themselves the slaves of "covetousness, which is idolatry." 3. A third class make no response to the call of Christ because of their love of pleasure. They care only for amusement, for sensuous excitement, or something to relieve the weariness and *ennui* of life, and to make it bright, eager, and thrilling. Enslaved and befooled by passion, "all that is within them doth condemn itself for being there." 4. Yet others are prevented

from joining us in our campaign because of their theological laxity. One religion, they urge, is as good as another, and to convert the heathen is a superfluous, if it be not an impossible, task. And similarly when men excuse their indifference to this great work on the ground of the coldness, the worldliness, and the strife of the Churches at home. The best of Christians are no doubt imperfect, the ideal of their life is but inadequately realised, and many who profess to be Christ's are sadly inconsistent. We deplore the fact, but it does not exempt us from a plain duty. Still the Saviour asks, "What is that to thee? follow thou Me." (*Jas. Stuart.*) *Religious indifference*:—I. THE LORD'S PEOPLE IDENTIFIED WITH THEIR LORD. Observe the bearing of this principle on—1. Sympathy (Acts ix. 4). 2. Power (Eph. i. 22). 3. Life and grace (John xv.). 4. Reproach (Luke x. 16). II. THE SIN OF MEROZ. This disregard of God's people implies—1. Ignorance of God's love to His children. 2. An imperfect sense of the scheme of Divine government. By human means, &c. 3. An imperfect sense of personal responsibility—Cain (Gen. iv. 9). 4. Indifference to God's truth and honour—Pilate. 5. Selfishness —Balaam. 6. Indecision—Peter in the judgment hall. III. THE SIN REMAINS. It is ever displaying itself in new forms. 1. The Church at home indifferent to the evangelisation of the heathen. 2. Wealthy congregations indifferent to poorer localities. 3. Women of ease and leisure to their burdened and weary sisters. 4. Parents unwilling to give their sons for the ministry. 5. Indifference to the conversion of souls. IV. THE RESULT IS THAT PUNISHMENT COMES UPON THE DEFAULTERS. 1. Of old it was, "If the Lord be God," &c. (1 Kings xviii. 21). Not less solemn and critical is the question now, "What think ye of Christ?" Not to confess Him is to deny Him (Matt. x. 33). 2. So with our employment of gifts and opportunities. The buried talent and the hidden pound, or their ill-using, involve the "darkness that is without." 3. So of the "brotherhood." We are to love it, to promote and defend it. There may be flaws, but this does not justify separation. It calls for prayer and the active operation of faith, sincerity, and truth. "They shall prosper that love thee." V. SHUN INDIFFERENCE AND INDECISION. They bring men to perish, like Balaam, with the ungodly. Be decided as Paul, though it bring the loss of all things. What is there so noble as to "fill up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ for His body's sake, which is the Church"? (Col. i. 24). (*H. W. Dearden, M.A.*) *The moral of the curse of Meroz*:—In a way that in some respects reminds us of the German prophetess Velleda, of the British queen Boadicea, and of the French peasant girl Joan of Arc, does Deborah revive the national spirit, and summon the people to repel the national foes. In this verse she utters true scorn for those who were inactive and self-contained in a time when the nation was in its throes for liberty and independence. I. OUR WORK FOR CHRIST IS VERY ANALOGOUS TO WAR. 1. In its fierce opposition. 2. In its reverses of victory and defeat. 3. In its call for a sacrifice. II. NEGLECT OF SUCH WORK INVOLVES US IN A CURSE. 1. The reproachful cry of the world's sin and sorrow. 2. Conscious separation from God. Common aim and common work are indispensable for true fellowship. 3. Loss of the rewards of true service. 4. Rebuke of Christ: "Ye did it not." (*U. R. Thomas.*) *Inaction*:—Notice, first of all, that the sin for which Meroz is cursed is pure inaction. There are in all our cities a great multitude of useless men and of men perfectly contented with their uselessness. Consider some of the various points which uselessness assumes. I. The first source of the uselessness of good men is MORAL COWARDICE. The vice is wonderfully common. The fear is concentrated on no individual, but is there not a sense of hostile or contemptuous surroundings that lies like a chilling hand upon what ought to be the most exuberant and spontaneous utterance of life? Men do not escape from their cowardice by having it proved to them that it is a foolish thing to be afraid. Nothing but the knowledge of God's love, taking such possession of a man that his one wish and thought in life is to glorify and serve God, can liberate him from, because it makes him totally forget, the fear of man. II. The second cause of uselessness is FALSE HUMILITY. Humility is good when it stimulates, it is bad when it paralyses, the active powers of a man. If conscious weakness causes a man to believe that it makes no difference whether he works or not, then his humility is his curse. Remember— 1. That man judges by the size of things; God judges by their fitness. 2. That small as you think you are, you are the average size of moral and intellectual humanity. 3. That such a humility as yours comes, if you get at its root, from an over-thought about yourself, an over-sense of your own personality, and so is closely akin to pride. III. The third cause of uselessness is INDOLENCE. There is only one permanent escape from indolence and self-indulgence—the grateful and

obedient dedication to God through Christ, which makes all good work, all self-sacrifice, a privilege and joy instead of a hardship, since it is done for Him. (*Bp. Phillips Brooks.*) *Zeal lacking:*—Take a heretic, a rebel, a person that hath an ill cause to manage; what he is deficient in the strength of his cause he makes up with diligence; while he that hath right on his side is cold, indiligent, lazy, inactive, trusting that the goodness of his cause will not fail to prevail without assistance. So wrong prevails, while evil persons are zealous and the good remiss. (*Bp. Jeremy Taylor.*)

Vers. 24–27. **Blessed above women shall Jael . . . be.**—*The blessing of Jael:*—And whose lips are they which pronounce this blessing? Indeed, it is Deborah the prophetess who sings this song; it is Deborah, by whom God spake, who gives utterance to this strain. It is clear that, revolting as her action appears at first view, there must be a way of looking at it in which it deserves all our sympathy and applause. I. First, we would observe THAT HUMAN ACTIONS ARE, IN GOD'S HOLY WORD, SPOKEN OF AS GOOD AND RIGHTEOUS, ALTHOUGH AT THE SAME TIME IT IS CERTAIN THAT THE BEST DEEDS OF THE BEST MEN ARE ALLOYED WITH EVIL. It would not, therefore, be out of harmony with the tenor of the inspired volume, that Jael should be called blessed for her deed, that her deed should meet with commendation from the prophetess, without it being thereby implied that she was quite undeserving blame. If her act contained some elements of good, amidst much of evil, it might, if the good preponderated, be esteemed and proclaimed as blessed. To this general observation we would add another, namely, that under the Jewish dispensation there was a lower standard of religious perfection than under the Christian. Hence it is that you find the most renowned characters of the Old Testament polluted with sins from which men of ordinary morality among ourselves would recoil. So that Jael's deed is to be judged, not by itself in the abstract, still less by the light of the gospel, but in reference to the code under which she lived, in reference to the knowledge of the Divine will then published among men; and so judged, it is not requisite that it should have been free from all blame in order to obtain praise. II. BUT WHAT WERE THE ELEMENTS OF GOOD IN THIS FAMOUS ACT OF THE KENITE WOMAN? Now we must here remind you of the real character of the Israelitish warfare. It is of course true that always the sword is God's weapon, as much as the famine or the pestilence. War is the scourge wherewith the Eternal lashes the nations when they wax proud against Him. But the difference between the case of the Israelites and every other conquering race is this, that the Israelites knew their mission, and went forth to execute it at God's bidding. And now, again, let us apply these principles to the case of Jael. The people of the Lord were in arms against the enemies of the Lord. We do not know whether Jael was a daughter of Israel; if not, her faith, as we shall see, is more remarkable. She had heard of the violence of the Canaanite for twenty years; she had heard that Deborah, in whom dwelt the spirit of prophecy, had aroused the men of Israel against Sisera. To her mind it was not a mere struggle of hostile nations for liberty and power. To her it was the battle of the Lord of hosts against the heathen who refused to worship Him; it was as the mustering of the armies of heaven against the armies of hell. We are aware that it is still open to you to object, that even if the killing Sisera can be justified, the craft which beguiled him must be reprehensible. In answer to this, we remind you of the observations wherewith we started, namely, that we need not prove Jael's act to be free from all defect, we are only concerned to show that it had in it many elements of good; and now we set it forth as an act evidencing strong faith in the God of Israel (faith still more marvellous if the Kenite's wife was not a daughter of Israel), as prompted by love for Him, and zeal for His cause. Such love and such zeal, even when evinced by an action not perfectly faultless, might well earn praise. But we go further. It may be doubted how far the treachery of the act, as it appears, was sinful. Is it wrong to use craft against Satan? May we resist the devil only by open force? May we not use prudence and tact and wiliness in avoiding temptation or in abating its force? III. THE WHOLE HISTORY OF THE ISRAELITES IS TYPICAL OF THE HISTORY OF THE REDEMPTION OF MANKIND BY JESUS CHRIST. The delivery of the Jews from their enemies, often as it occurs, is symbolical of the greater deliverance of all people from the thraldom of Satan. And whilst the general history is thus broadly significant, the distinct parts of that history lead us almost irresistibly to the remembrance of particular features in the history of Christ's salvation. (*Bp. Woodford.*)

The blessing of Jael by Deborah:—I. THE DIFFICULTY IS NOT TO BE SURMOUNTED BY DENYING THE INSPIRATION OF DEBORAH'S UTTERANCE. If this were so—if it might be maintained that Deborah is wrong when she pronounces Jael blessed—how are we to know that she is right in her other statements? Upon what principle are we to draw the exact line of demarcation? II. IN WHAT SENSE ARE WE TO UNDERSTAND DEBORAH'S LANGUAGE, AND HOW ARE WE TO RECONCILE IT WITH WHAT WOULD SEEM, AT FIRST SIGHT, TO BE THE TRUE CHARACTER OF JAEL'S ACTION? 1. Sisera's life was, in Deborah's judgment, rightly forfeited. He was the Lord's enemy. He represented, in Deborah's eye—(1) An impure and cruel system of idolatry, which had been sentenced to extermination by God; (2) a long career of plunder and murder, which had brought untold miseries upon the poor peasants of Naphtali and Zebulun. 2. Deborah's language about Jael is relative language. (1) Relative to the conduct of other persons than Jael. The contrast is really between the motive and the absence of motive; between the will to do what is right and the absence of will. (2) Relative to the time and circumstances in which Jael lived, and to the opportunities at her command; or, rather, to the absence of such opportunities. Jael's loyalty to Israel, and to the one ray of truth she knew, is admirable; the method she chose for expressing her loyalty, though for her quite a matter of course and custom, is deplorable. For acting fully up to all the light she possessed she deserved the meed of praise awarded her by Deborah. III. CONCLUDING LESSONS. 1. Note the equitableness of Deborah's estimate of Jael. How often do we, in our judgment of others, measure their failures by some standard of which they have never heard, and refuse them credit for excellences which in them are even consummate! Their standard is a very poor and low one, it may be, but if they have had no chance of learning something better, it is the standard by which they will be judged. We do not risk loyalty to higher truth than any of which they know if in judging them we are strong enough to be equitable. 2. This history would be sorely misapplied if we were to gather from it that a good motive justifies any action that is known to be bad. Jael could not have been pronounced "blessed" had she been a Jewess, much less had she been a Christian. The blessings which the ignorant may inherit are forfeited when those who know, or might know, more act as do the ignorant. (*Canon Liddon.*) *Deborah's praise of Jael*:—We need not weight ourselves with the suspicion that the prophetess reckoned Jael's deed the outcome of a Divine thought. No; but we may believe this of Jael, that she is on the side of Israel, her sympathy so far repressed by the league of her people with Jabin, yet prompting her to use every opportunity of serving the Hebrew cause. It is clear that if the Kenite treaty had meant very much, and Jael had felt herself bound by it, her tent would have been an asylum for the fugitive. But she is against the enemies of Israel; her heart is with the people of Jehovah in the battle, and she is watching eagerly for signs of the victory she desires them to win. Unexpected, startling, the sign appears in the fleeing captain of Jabin's host, alone, looking wildly for shelter. "Turn in, my lord; turn in." Will he enter? Will he hide himself in a woman's tent? Then to her will be committed vengeance. It will be an omen that the hour of Sisera's fate has come. Hospitality itself must yield; she will break even that sacred law to do stern justice on a coward, a tyrant, and an enemy of God. A line of thought like this is entirely in harmony with the Arab character. The moral ideas of the desert are rigorous, and contempt rapidly becomes cruel. A tent woman has few elements of judgment, and, the balance turning, her conclusion was be quick, remorseless. Jael is no blameless heroine; neither is she a demon. Deborah, who understands her, reads clearly the rapid thoughts, the swift decision, the unscrupulous act, and sees, behind all, the purpose of serving Israel. Her praise of Jael is therefore with knowledge; but she herself would not have done the thing she praises. All possible explanations made, it remains a murder, a wild, savage thing for a woman to do; and we may ask whether among the tents of Zaanaim Jael was not looked on from that day as a woman stained and shadowed, one who had been treacherous to a guest. Not here can the moral be found that the end justifies the means, or that we may do evil with good intent; which never was a Bible doctrine, and never can be. On the contrary, we find it written clear that the end does not justify the means. Sisera must live on and do the worst he may rather than any soul should be soiled with treachery or any hand defiled by murder. There are human vermin, human scorpions and vipers. Is Christian society to regard them, to care for them? The answer is that Providence regards them and cares for them. They are human after all—men whom God has made,

for whom there are yet hopes, who are no worse than others would be if Divine grace did not guard and deliver. Rightly does Christian society affirm that a human being in peril, in suffering, in any extremity common to men, is to be succoured as a man, without inquiry whether he is good or vile. What, then, of justice, and man's administration of justice? This, that they demand a sacred calm, elevation above the levels of personal feeling, mortal passion and ignorance. Law is to be of no private, sudden, unconsidered administration. Only in the most solemn and orderly way is the trial of the worst malefactor to be gone about, sentence passed, justice executed. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*)

Ver. 28–30. **Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariots?**—*The delayed chariot:*—The language of this hoping, yet half-despairing and disconsolate mother, has been, I presume, the language of multitudes some time or other in the stern fight of existence and the moral campaign of consecrated life. When God has tarried in His pavilion of cloud, withholding both Himself and His blessings, our hearts have struggled and our lips quivered with wondering desire to know the reason "why," until impatience has bubbled over in anxious inquiry, "Why is His chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of His chariots?" God stays not from us because, like Sisera, He is a dismounted general and a slain warrior: men fall, but He never. He always has a sublime design in His tarrying, a good and satisfactory reason for His delay, which He does not always make known, but leaves us to spell out as best we can for ourselves. He tarries to do us good, and not to taunt; to check our impatience and correct our hurrying spirit, and not to discourage or distress. He will come to us if we only wait long enough: and His coming shall be as the morning—fresh, fragrant, and radiant. I. Let us look at this text as the language of the UNIVERSAL CHURCH. The Church in the wilderness, the Church militant, for nearly nineteen centuries has been breathing fervently the prayer commanded by her Founder—"Thy kingdom come." And in her anticipation of the answer and the advent, in her longings after complete victory, universal regeneration, when truth and peace shall sway her sceptre in every land, and the Christ-King shall be enthroned in every heart—I say, in her longings after this glorious era, she plaintively ejaculates, "Why is His chariot so long in coming?" "Why does my Lord delay His coming?" The progress of Christianity, the achievements and triumphs of truth, we are told, have been so slow, so few, so limited, for the time in which it has been at work, that our learned doubters and avowed foes have written upon it in big letters, "Failure!" Well, we are not surprised at that. Had there not been something about it which largely savoured of success, they would not have been so hasty to label it with failure! Moreover, slowness of progress, of growth, is no proof of failure. Are not the greatest works of God and man the result of slow processes? I would ask, must the corn be pronounced a failure because it does not wave in golden harvests after a night and a day's growth? Must the old sun be pronounced a failure because it does not march instantaneously, but by degrees, to the meridian? What if Christianity has been slow in its march?—it has been sure. It has been moving in no circle of uncertainty, no region of doubt and ill-based probabilities! It has been making solid headway. And if other systems of religion—false and flashy—have sprung up with the rapidity of the mushroom, they have been as fragile and unenduring. II. Look at this text as the language of the INDIVIDUAL CHURCH DESIRING AND EXPECTING A SPECIAL VISIT FROM HEAVEN. The chilling winds of worldliness have swept over the Church, or the mildew of indifference has fallen on some, and the cankerous rust of idleness on others, while some have become intoxicated with pride, and others poisoned with heresy, numbed with doubt, and wild with the delirium of controversy. So that the Church is bordering on lifelessness, its strength low, its energies exhausted, its influence and glory almost gone. The few in her that have not defiled their garments nor indulged in worldly ease, who are true and loyal, and steadfast and earnest, tremble for the "ark of God," and grieve to see it drifting to the fatal rocks; and in agony of soul cry, "Why is His chariot so long in coming to our help?" Hold on faith, hold on patience, hold on pleading—loosen not your grasp of Omnipotence, your Jacob-like grip on God—cease not to ask, to seek, to knock, to wait: in Jehovah's own time the golden gates will open, the flaming steed will rush out. He who speeds His way through a wilderness of worlds, through untraversed solitudes of space, will steer His glad "chariot" to your sanctuary and in the midst of the Church, and scatter the gifts of His grace and the benedictions of His love. III. Look at this text as

the language of the PENITENT SINNER SEEKING AND DESIRING CHRIST. A penitent soul is one of earth's grandest pictures. When the obdurate heart melts and weeps, and the unwilling knees bend in lowly submission, and the prayer uprises to heaven, "What must I do to be saved?" and the poor sinner is passing through the sharp ordeal of repentance, then it is we read in the mystic language of tears and sighs the plaintive words of my text, "Why is His chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of His chariot?" Should there be one such penitent soul waiting for the coming of Jesus, listening for the rumbling of His chariot wheels to give him "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness," tarry on your knees, tighten your grip of faith, wait! and He that will come shall come; and His arrival shall be all the more welcome and blissful for the delay and the waiting. IV. Again, we may regard the text as THE LANGUAGE OF THE CONSECRATED BUT CLOUDED CHILD OF GOD, MOURNING PROTRACTED DELAY OF CONSCIOUS COMMUNION. For a time God has seemed to depart: He has withdrawn His light, His conscious presence. No voice speaks, no face beams, no hands leads, no presence remains; the soul presses, as it thinks, near to Him, but He is not there; it speaks, but there is no response; it gropes in the distressing darkness, but finds Him not. We should, however, never forget that the halting of Jehovah is not to tantalise, but to test; not to inflict unneeded pain, but to produce great spiritual profit. The hiding of His face is simply for the multiplying of His grace. Suspended communion is intended to do for us what the storm does for the tree, what the fire does for the silver and gold, what the lapidary's wheel does for the jewel. Such absence only makes the heart grow fonder. The longing desire for repossession and renewed fellowship is a pledge of a consecrated heart, and a prophecy that sooner or later He will return. V. Again, look at this text as the language of GOD'S AFFLICTED CHILD DAILY EXPECTING HIS CHARIOT TO TAKE HIM HOME. Home, sweet home! what a precious monosyllable! God sometimes keeps His chosen ones a long time in the final fires, in the finishing process—a long time lingering between the two worlds—suffering, dying. With what a "spirit of expectant hope" and holy calm did Francis Ridley Havergal contemplate and wait for death. There was acute and continued suffering—at times most severe; but the presence of "the King" was fully realised, and His grace was sufficient for her. She startled her medical adviser on one of his early visits by the emphatic inquiry, "Now tell me, doctor, candidly, is there any chance of my seeing Him?" Later on she said, "Not one thing hath failed, tell them all round: trust Jesus: it is simply trusting Jesus." "Spite of the breakers, not a fear." "I am just waiting for Jesus to take me in." "I thought He would have left me here awhile, but He is so good to take me so soon." "I have such an intense craving for the music of heaven." Then, as if "longing to depart and be with Christ, which is far better," she said, "Why tarrieth His chariot?" (*J. O. Keen, D.D.*)

Ver. 31. So let all Thine enemies perish, O Lord.—*The imprecations of the Old Testament:*—I have chosen this verse rather than any detailed utterances from the imprecations that are found in the imprecatory Psalms, because I believe it contains the key that will enable us to solve the inner meaning and the spiritual relations of these imprecations. It is always, I think, a wise thing to get a principle, if possible, where it is clearly stated, rather than where it is hidden by a mass of obscure material. Once we get the principle—the key of the question—we can then use it to bring order into what may appear at first sight to be disorder. I. EXAMINE THE MODERN THEORY THAT ASSERTS THAT THESE IMPRECATORY PASSAGES WERE INSPIRED BY UNHOLY PERSONAL VINDICTIVENESS. The recoil from rigid theories of inspiration has caused some to run riot. They make swift work of anything that offends their taste or that they cannot immediately comprehend—they cut it out with the ready pen-knife. This seems an easy way of getting over difficulties. Yet, theory or no theory, there is a living unity and congruity in the Scriptures which demands recognition, and will revenge itself upon indiscriminate mutilation. But, someone may ask, is it not reasonable to suppose that even some of the Old Testament saints, under a fit of provocation, may have indulged in fierce imprecations, in such curses as these. I hesitate even to answer that in the affirmative. But that is not all you have to suppose. You have not only to suppose that one of these saints could lose his self-control and his spiritual sense so far as to indulge in terrible curses, inspired by personal malignity, but you have also to suppose that he deliberately threw that vindictive outburst into a high form of literary composition, bestowing upon it great literary care and skill;

that he put it into the form of a sacred psalm, and deliberately designed that that furious outburst of evil and vindictive passion should be preserved and perpetuated. You have yet further to suppose that that man, inspired by the Satanic passion within him, having composed his psalm, was able to induce the elect nation, the people whose religious and spiritual intuitions were so marvellous, whom God was training in such a special manner, you have to suppose that that people adopted into their sacred book some of the most Satanic utterances ever given expression to by a member of their own or any other race. I would have you also note this. The most terrible imprecations occur in the Book of Psalms, and the Book of Psalms reaches the high water mark of spiritual thought and conception among the Jews. Such a supposition reduces the spiritual history of Israel to complete chaotic confusion. There is another consideration that is worthy of notice. These imprecatory Psalms, especially the 69th, are quoted in the New Testament more frequently perhaps than any other passage in the Old Testament Scriptures, quoted as forming a true and legitimate part of the sacred Scriptures of the Jews, quoted, mark you, not by fossilised and prejudiced Jews, but by the apostles of Jesus Christ. II. PLACE THESE UTTERANCES IN THEIR TRUE SETTING IN THE WRITINGS OF THE OLD SCRIPTURES. You will now understand why I have chosen these words as my text. "So let all Thine enemies perish, O Lord." "Thine enemies." This is the key that unlocks the whole matter. The ancient inspired writers never asked for the descent of judgment on their own personal account simply, but always as a vindication and assertion of eternal righteousness. There are two things we must remember, however, in considering these prayers for the extermination of the ungodly. The first is that these prayers refer primarily, almost, if not altogether, exclusively to the government of God upon this earth. When the psalmist prays that the wicked may be "blotted out of the book of life," he is not speaking in the language of the New Testament, but in that of the Old, and from the standpoint of the earth. He is not praying for spiritual and eternal condemnation; he is praying that the race of the ungodly may be exterminated from this world. We must remember, further, that it is the wicked, as such, upon whom these judgments are denounced. The imprecation has force only in so far as the wicked continues in his wickedness. III. COMPARE THESE UTTERANCES WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT STANDPOINT. It is easy to see, first, that the New Testament has a clearer view of the eternal scope of God's government. It does not trouble us as it did the Jew when we see the ungodly flourish here, because we know that this life is but a short time in the annals of human life. We know that this earth's history is only a speck in the history of the human race. Then there is another advance. We have larger conceptions of the love and forbearance of God. The ancient Jew could not understand the possibility of salvation for all. The world was divided into two parts for him—the righteous and the wicked; and they stood on each side of the moral line; and there was scarcely any crossing over. And especially did the Jewish nation in its entirety stand out in opposition to the other nations of the earth. The Jew had very little hope of God's loving them, and bringing them into the joy of His grace. The ancient Jew desired righteousness to be vindicated by the victory of the righteous over the wicked; we rather desire that righteousness may be glorified by the victories of love, and that all men may be brought out of the sphere of destruction into the life and glory of God. But do not forget that that old principle of judgment was true. It is still in force, although it is now subordinate to the principle of life and hope; but we must not lose sight of it. Do not spurn these old solemn, terrible denunciations because Christ has set them in a blaze of love. (*John Thomas, M.A.*)

Jewish zeal, a pattern to Christians:—What a contrast do these words present to the history which goes before them! Here is the picture of indolence and unfaithfulness leading to cowardice, to apostasy, and to national ruin. On the other hand consider, by way of contrast, the narrative contained in the chapter which ends with the text. Here is a picture of manly obedience to God's will—a short trial of trouble and suffering—and then the reward, peace. What the Old Testament especially teaches us is this: that zeal is as essentially a duty of all God's rational creatures as prayer and praise, faith and submission; and, surely, if so, especially of sinners whom He hath redeemed; that zeal consists in a strict attention to His commands—a scrupulousness, vigilance, heartiness, and punctuality which bears with no reasoning or questioning about them—an intense thirst for the advancement of His glory; a shrinking from the pollution of sin and sinners; an indignation, nay, impatience, at witnessing His honour insulted; a quickness of feeling when His name is mentioned, and a jealousy how it is mentioned;

a fulness of purpose, an heroic determination to yield Him service at whatever sacrifice of personal feeling; an energetic resolve to push through all difficulties, were they as mountains, when His eye or hand but gives the sign: a carelessness of obloquy, or reproach, or persecution, a forgetfulness of friend and relative, nay, a hatred (so to say) of all that is naturally dear to us, when He says, "Follow Me." These are some of the characteristics of zeal. Now, it has sometimes been said that the commands of strenuous and stern service given to the Israelites, for instance, those relative to their taking and keeping possession of the promised land, do not apply to us Christians. There can be no doubt it is not our duty to take the sword and kill the enemies of God as the Jews were told to do. But it does not hence follow that the temper of mind which they presuppose and foster is not required of us; else, surely, the Jewish history is no longer profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. Man's duty, perfection, happiness, have always been one and the same. What was the holiness of an Israelite is still the holiness of a Christian, though the Christian has far higher privileges and aids for perfection. It is impossible, then, that all these duties imposed on the Israelites of driving out their enemies, and taking and keeping possession of the promised land, should not in some sense or other apply to us; for it is clear they were not in their case mere accidents of obedience, but went to form a certain inward character, and as clear is it that our heart must be as the heart of Moses or David if we should be saved through Christ. This is quite evident if we attentively examine the Jewish history and the Divine commands which are the principles of it. For these commands, which some persons have said do not apply to us, are so many and varied, and repeated at so many and divers times, that they certainly must have formed a peculiar character in the heart of the obedient Israelite, and were much more than an outward form and a sort of ceremonial service. Let us consider some of the commands I have referred to, and the terms in which they are conveyed. For instance, that for the extirpation of the devoted nations from the land of Canaan (Deut. vii. 1–5, 16). Next observe this merciless temper, as profane people would call it, but as well-instructed Christians say, this godly zeal, was enjoined upon them under far more distressing circumstances, viz., the transgressions of their own relations and friends (Deut. xiii. 6–9). Now, doubtless, we at this day are not to put men to death for idolatry; but, doubtless also, whatever temper of mind the fulfilment of this command implied in the Jew, such, essentially, must be our temper of mind, whatever else it may be also; for God cannot speak two laws, He cannot love two characters—good is good, and evil is evil (Psa. xix. 7, 8, 10, 11). A self-mastering, fearless obedience was another part of this same religious temper enjoined on the Jews, and still incumbent, as I dare affirm, on us Christians (Josh. xxiii. 6). It required an exceeding moral courage in the Jews to enable them to go straight forward, seduced neither by their feelings nor their reason. Nor was the severe temper under review a duty in the early ages of Judaism only. The Book of Psalms was written at different times, between David's age and the captivity, yet it plainly breathes the same hatred of sin and opposition to sinners (Psa. cxxxix. 21-24). Further still, after the return from the captivity, after the prophets had enlarged the compass of Divine revelation, and purified and heightened the religious knowledge of the nation, still this rigid and austere zeal was enjoined and enforced in all its ancient vigour by Ezra. The Jews set about a reformation; and what was its most remarkable act? Let us attend to the words of Ezra (ix. 3, 4). Now, I do not say that every one ought to have done what Ezra did, for he was supernaturally directed; but would the course he adopted have ever entered into the mind of men of this day, or can they even understand or acquiesce in it, now that they know it? for what did he? He offered a confession and intercession in behalf of the people; then at length he and the people came to a decision, which was no other than this—to command all persons who had married foreign wives to put them away. He undid the evil as well as hindered it in future. What an act of self-denying zeal was this in a multitude of people! These are some out of many instances which might be brought from the Jewish history in proof of the duty of strict and severe loyalty to God and His revealed will. There was an occasion when our Lord is expressly said to have taken upon Him the zeal which consumed David (Matt. xxi. 12, 13). Surely, unless we had this account given us by an inspired writer, we should not have believed it! To put aside form, to dispense with the ministry of His attendant angels, to act before He had spoken His displeasure, to use His own hand, to hurry to and fro, to be a servant in the work of purification, surely this must have arisen from a fire of

indignation at witnessing His Father's house insulted which we sinners cannot understand. But anyhow it is but the perfection of that temper which, as we have seen, was encouraged and exemplified in the Jewish Church. Such is the pattern afforded us by our Lord; to which add the example of the angels which surround Him. Surely in Him is mingled "goodness and severity"; such, therefore, are all holy creatures, loving and severe. We read of their thoughts and desires in the Apocalypse (xiv. 7, xvi. 5–7, xviii. 5, 6), all which passages imply a deep and solemn acquiescence in God's judgments. Thus a certain fire of zeal, showing itself, not by force and blood, but as really and certainly as if it did —cutting through natural feelings, neglecting self, preferring God's glory to all things, firmly resisting sin, protesting against sinners, and steadily contemplating their punishment—is a duty belonging to all creatures of God, a duty of Christians, in the midst of all that excellent overflowing charity which is the highest gospel grace and the fulfilling of the second table of the law. And such, in fact, has ever been the temper of the Christian Church, in evidence of which I need but appeal to the impressive fact that the Jewish Psalter has been the standard book of Christian devotion from the first down to this day. Now I shall make a few observations in conclusion, with a view of showing how meekness and charity are compatible with this austere and valiant temper of the Christian soldier. 1. Of course it is absolutely sinful to have any private enmities. Not the bitterest personal assaults upon us should induce us to retaliate. We must do good for evil, love those who hate, bless those who curse us, and pray for those who despitefully use us. It is only when it is impossible at once to be kind to them and give glory to God that we may cease to act kindly towards them. We hate sinners by putting them out of our sight, as if they were not, by annihilating them, in our affections. And this we must do, even in the case of our friends and relations, if God requires it. But in no case are we to allow ourselves in resentment or malice. 2. Next, it is quite compatible with the most earnest zeal to offer kind offices to God's enemies when in distress. I do not say that a denial of these offices may not be a duty ordinarily, for it is our duty, as St. John tells us in his second Epistle, not even to receive them into our houses. But the case is very different where men are brought into extremity. 3. And, further, the Christian keeps aloof from sinners in order to do them good. A true friend is he who speaks out, and, when a man sins, shows him that he is displeased at the sin. (*J. H. Newman, D.D.*) *The enemies and friends of Jehovah*:—I. THE TRUE CHARACTER AND CERTAIN DOOM OF THE UNGODLY. 1. The term "enemies" will apply to all the unrenewed portions of mankind. The heart is positively hostile, &c. "Carnal mind is enmity against God," &c. (1) There are the daring enemies of God, who sceptically treat His revelation, yea, deny His being. They attack His rule; despise His word; rail at His servants; try to subvert His cause. (2) There are the profane and reckless enemies of God, who defy, contemn the Most High—Pharaoh, Belshazzar, Herod. (3) There are those who are wickedly neutral, and who temporise in religion. 2. Now as to the doom of the enemies of God they will all perish except they repent; all have one condemnation, sentence, woeful abode. It will include—(1) Utter shame and confusion; (2) total wretchedness and misery; (3) eternal ruin and despair. II. THE ILLUSTRIOUS REPRESENTATION GIVEN OF THE FRIENDS OF JESUS: "Them that love Him." In the enemy we look for hate; in the friend, love. Now love to Jesus is—1. A Divine principle of God and from God. The result of regeneration. 2. A pre-eminent principle. Above all, it has the centre, it reigns, it subordinates. 3. It is manifest. Lives, breathes, speaks, acts. Moves all the springs of the heart. Affects all the machinery of life. Loosens the tongue, employs the hands and feet. Mark the representation—"Let them that love Him be as the sun," &c. Now, the metaphor will apply—(1) To the exalted station which they occupy. Sin debases, sinks, &c. Religion exalts. (2) To the spiritual rays they diffuse abroad. "Ye were once darkness," &c. Now lights, &c. "Arise, shine," &c. (3) As fertilising and beautifying all around. Now, believers shed moral beauty all around. Holy virtues, heavenly graces, Christ-like feelings, all tend to expel the winter of moral evil and misery, like the sun. (4) Irresistibly advancing in their glorious career. (5) Like the sun setting in celestial radiance and moral splendour. However bright the career, it must cease on earth. See the aged Christian declining, &c.; at last it sets—but watch the scene. No stormy sky, no threatening tempest, no cloud; all still and tranquil and clear; the whole horizon mellowed with the golden glory. (6) As the sun rising in another hemisphere and shining in fairer worlds. Is that setting sun annihilated? He rises in another land as he sets in

this. So with those who once shone here, &c. They are lost to us but they still live, and are more radiant, shine brighter, &c. Application: 1. Let the subject be the test of character. Are we enemies? &c. 2. Learn the supreme excellence of true religion. Godliness leads to honour, usefulness, blessedness, and glory. 3. Let the enemies of God consider. "Kiss the Son lest He be angry," &c. 4. Let the professed friends of Jesus exemplify their principles. (*J. Burns, D.D.*) *The rival armies:*—I. THE ENEMIES OF THE LORD. 1. Their character. (1) The idolater. The giving up the throne of our being to any king but God. (2) The forgetful. (3) The indifferent. As God adds to His mercies we subtract from our thanks. (4) The undecided. An insult to God, for He has granted evidence sufficient. (5) The reckless. Those who defile, despise, and disgrace the unutterable goodness of the Lord. 2. Their doom. They perish. (1) As without God, and so cut off from the only source of true life. (2) As without God and so without hope. (3) As fighting against God and so doomed to certain defeat. II. THE FRIENDS OF THE LORD. "As the sun when he goeth forth in his might." The figure refers not to the period from sunrise to sunset but from sunrise to the meridian of his splendour. It is a striking metaphor as setting forth the glorious ongoing and enlivening influence of the Christian character. 1. Very quiet. 2. Gladdening. 3. Regular and sure. 4. Increasing in brightness. (*H. G. Parrish, B.A.*) *Rejoicing at the death of an oppressor:*—Hearing a whole choir of birds chirping merrily together, my curiosity was excited to inquire into the occasion of their convocation and merriment, when I quickly perceived a dead hawk in the bush, about which they made such a noise, seeming to triumph at the death of an enemy. I could not blame them for singing the knell of one who, like a cannibal, was wont to feed upon their living bodies, tearing them limb from limb, and scaring them with his frightful appearance. Over this bird, which was so formidable when alive, the most timid wren or titmouse did not now fear to chirp or hop. This occurrence brought to my mind the case of tyrants and oppressors. When living, they are the terror of mankind; but when dead, they are the objects of general contempt and scorn. "When the wicked perish, there is shouting" (Prov. xi. 10). The death of Nero was celebrated by the Romans with bonfires and plays; birds ate the naked flesh of Pompey; Alexander lay unburied thirty days; but a useful and holy life is generally closed by an honourable and lamented death. *The victorious course of the Divine kingdom:*—The song closes with an apostrophe or prediction of a similar and sure disappointment and fatal issue for every evil cause; while brighter and brighter must wax the course of God's kingdom on the earth, like the sun shining forth in its strength towards the effulgence of perfect day. It is at once a principle, a prediction, and a prayer. 1. A principle: for there is a Divine cause and interest of God in the world, often obscured by human passion, often clouded with sad disaster, like the sun wading through mist and storm, but destined ever to re-assert itself and establish its bright ascendancy. 2. A prediction. Every inimical interest must and shall give way and succumb to His undying kingdom, with the seed Divine of immortal youth within its bosom—

> "And the power of each foe, as if smote with the sword,
> Shall melt like the snow in the glance of the Lord."

3. A prayer. So is it, so it shall be: and so says the singer, let it be. (*A. H. Drysdale, M.A.*) Let them that love Him be as the sun.—*Christians like the sun:*—I. THE CHARACTER OF GOD'S PEOPLE: "They love Him." 1. This love has been implanted in their hearts by the Holy Spirit. Formerly they hated Him and His service. 2. Their love is sincere. It must be so if the Spirit has created it in the heart (Eph. vi. 24). The love of many, however, is merely professional. 3. This love is supreme: "Whom have I in heaven but Thee?" &c. 4. This love is practical. It dwells in the heart and shows itself in the life. 5. It is self-denying. II. THE SIMILITUDE BY WHICH THE CHARACTER OF GOD'S PEOPLE IS ILLUSTRATED. 1. The sun receives its light from the creative energy of God (Psa. cxxxvi. 8). So Christians have derived their light from God Himself (2 Cor. iv. 6). 2. Christians resemble the sun in beauty: "Truly light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun." So Christians are beautiful in their individual spiritual character—in their associated character. 3. The sun is a visible object; it excites attention and inspires admiration. The course of Christians is not hidden; they are lights of the world, cities set on a hill, living epistles (Matt. v. 16). 4. The Christian resembles the sun in usefulness.

What a dark world this would be if the natural sun were to cease its shining? What would the world be without Christianity? (1) As the rising sun dispels clouds and darkness, so the believer rises above the changes and calamities of life—he dispels the mists and darkness of prejudice; proves that religion does not tend to licentiousness, that it is not a system of melancholy. (2) Like the sun, the Christian spreads the most salutary and delightful effects around. The sun is the great spirit of the world, in the light of which all things are made to rejoice. So the life of the Christian and the benevolent efforts of the Church, in conjunction with Divine power, are calculated to make the desert blossom as the rose, &c. (Isa. xxxv. 1, 2). (3) The influence of the sun is very extensive, reaching to every creature. The charity of Christians would save the whole world. 5. The light of the sun is irresistible. Who can say to it, "Hitherto shalt thou come"? &c. No one can stop the work of the Church, for it is God's work (Isa. lv. 11). O Christians, like the sun, shine more and more unto the perfect day. They grow in grace, in knowledge, purity, peace, joy, till their course terminates in the meridian noontide splendour of heaven. (*Helps for the Pulpit.*) *Love makes suns*:—If we think of the singer, of the age, and the occasion of the song, such purely spiritual, lofty words must seem very remarkable. I. Note, first, how here we have A PENETRATING INSIGHT INTO THE ESSENCE OF RELIGION. This woman had been nourished upon a more or less perfect edition of what we know as the "Mosaic law." Her faith had been fed by forms. She moved amidst a world full of the cruelties and dark conceptions of a mysterious Divine power which torture heathenism apart from Christianity. She had forced her way through all that, and laid hold of the vital centre. And there, away out amidst cruelty and murder, amidst the unutterable abominations and terrors of heathenism, in the centre of a rigid system of ceremonial and retaliation, the woman's heart spoke out and taught her what was the great commandment. Deborah had got as far, in a moment of exaltation and insight, as the teaching of the apostle John, although her thought was strangely blended with the fierceness of the times in which she lived. Her approval of Jael's deed by no means warrants our approving it, but we may thankfully see that though she felt the fierce throbbing of desire for vengeance, she also felt this—"Them that love Him; that is the Alpha and Omega of all." Our love must depend on our knowledge. Deborah's knowledge was a mere skeleton outline as compared with ours. Contrast the fervour of emotional affection that manifestly throbbed in her heart with the poor, cold pulsations which we dignify by the name of love, and the contrast may put us to shame. II. Further, note THE GRAND CONCEPTION OF THE CHARACTER WHICH SUCH A LOVE PRODUCES: "Let them be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might." Think of the fierce eastern sun, with "sunbeams like swords," that springs up from the east and rushes to the zenith, and "nothing is hid from the heat thereof"—a sun the like of which we, in our cloudy skies, know little about, but which, to the Oriental, is the very emblem of splendour and of continuous victorious power. There are two things here—radiance and energy, light and might. "As the sun when he goeth forth in his strength." Deborah was a "prophetess," and people say, "What did she prophesy?" Well, she prophesied the heart of religion in reference to its essence, and, as one sees by this phrase, in reference to its effects. What is her word but a partial anticipation of Christ's saying, "Ye are the light of the world"; and of His disciple's utterance, "Ye were sometimes darkness, and now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of the light"? "Is Deborah's aspiration fulfilled about me?" Let each of us ask that. "As the sun when he goeth forth in his strength"—would anybody say that about my Christian character? Why not? Only because the springs have run low within is the stream low through the meadows. Only because the love is cold is the light feeble. There is another thing here. There is power in sunlight as well as radiance. On that the prophetess especially lays a finger. "As the sun when he goeth forth in his strength." She did not know what we know, that solar energy is the source of all energy on this earth, and that, just as in the deepest analysis "there is no power but of God," so in the material region we may say that the only force is the force of the sun, which not only stimulates vegetation and brings light and warmth—as the pre-scientific prophetess knew—but in a hundred other ways, unknown to her and known to modern science, is the author of all change, the parent of all life, and the reservoir of all energy. And so we come to this thought: the true love of God is no weak, sentimental thing, such as narrow and sectional piety has often represented it to be, but it is a power which will invigorate the whole of a man and make him strong and manly as well as gentle and gracious; being, indeed,

the parent of all the so-called heroic and of all the so-called saintly virtues. If you love God you will surely be a strong man as well as an emotional and affectionate Christian. That energy is to be continuous and progressive. The sun that Deborah saw day by day spring from his station in the east and climb to his height in the heavens and ray down his beams, has been doing that for millions of years, and it will probably keep doing it for uncounted periods still. And so the Christian man, with continuity unbroken and progressive brilliance and power, should shine more and more till the unsetting noontide of the day. III. Here is A PROPHECY OF WHICH THE UTTERER WAS UNAWARE. There is a contrast drawn in the words of our text and in those immediately preceding. "So," says Deborah, after the fierce description of the slaughter—"so let all Thine enemies perish, O Lord! but let them that love Thee be as the sun when he shineth in his strength." She contrasts the transiency of the lives that pit themselves against God with the perpetuity that belongs to those which are in harmony with Him, because the livers are lovers of Him. The truth goes further than she probably knew; certainly further than she was thinking when she chanted these words. Let us widen them by other words which use the same metaphor and say, "They that be wise"—that is a shallower word than "them that love Thee"—"they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." Let us widen and deepen them by sacreder words still, for Jesus Christ laid hold of this old metaphor and said, describing the time when all the enemies shall have perished and the weeds have been flung out of the vineyard, "Then shall the righteous blaze forth like the sun in the kingdom of My Father." A brilliancy that will fill heaven with new galaxies, bright beyond all that we see here, amidst the thick atmosphere and mists and clouds of the present life! (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Interposing power*:—I. THE OBJECT: "Them that love Him." II. THE REQUEST: "Let them be as the sun." I think the chief doctrine here intended is that of infallibility. First, the sun is a faithful witness in heaven. The sun has never failed yet, and never can fail. "When He goeth forth in His might." The Scriptures are clear that the people are all predestinated to be conformed to the image of Christ; that what He is they are to be. Did not Jesus Christ go forth in His might in His humiliation; and doth He not also go forth in His might in His exaltation? III. THE REPOSE HERE MENTIONED: "The land had rest forty years." How is it that they had rest forty years? Well, they had rest, liberty, and quiet, enjoying all the privileges of the promised land during these forty years, by one of the most simple things. It was by simply rejecting all false gods, and abiding by the God of Israel, and just bringing up a little of past history, and learning that this God, who had delivered them from Egypt, this God, who had sustained them through the wilderness, this God that brought them into the promised land and planted them there, He, and He alone, was God; and the consequence was that their liberty remained, their harvests were good, their vintage was good, their flocks and their herds increased, and they were every way happy. Just so now; if we would have spiritual rest, spiritual settlement, and real prosperity, it must be by simply abiding by that truth that represents the great God to us as a Saviour, that represents Him in a covenant ordered in all things and sure—simply abiding by that. Now how was it they had rest no longer than forty years? I can hardly tell; but you do not get through the next chapter before you stumble upon an altar, and say, "What altar is this?" This is not the Lord's; no, it is Baal's. And here is a beautiful grove and gardens—everything made pleasant to the flesh, a great display. Well, how in the world Baal got in again I do not know, but I should not wonder if it was either by trade affairs, or else by matrimonial affairs, or else by both. (*James Wells.*)

CHAPTER VI.

VERS. 1–10. Because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens . . . and caves and strongholds.—*Divine punishment through natural means*:—Thus God gets at men through various means. The Midianites came out and spoiled the fields of the Israelites. The camels of the Midianites were without number; they entered the land to destroy it. Wheresoever they laid

their hand they crushed the hope of Israel. Has God a way into our life, then, through corn and grass? Has He a way to chastise us through the medium of our business? Can He turn a client away and send a customer in another direction, and blind a man whilst he is counting his money? and can He so arrange things that prosperity shall crumble into adversity and a dense darkness shall settle upon the brightness of prosperity? This is God's way of doing. He gets at men through their skin; He smites them with leprosy that they may learn to pray; He curses their bread that they may cry out about the better life; He drops poison into their water that they may learn that they have committed two evils—they have forsaken Him, the fountain of living water, and have hewn out unto themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water. These things should bring us to study, to reflection, to inquiry. "Why has this adversity come upon me? why do men actually pine and die? Is there not a cause?" (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Divine retribution*:—The famished, terror-stricken fugitives, are they indeed the sons of the men of old before whom the elders of Moab and of Midian trembled, and against whom the prince of sorcerers confessed that no enchantments could prevail? These crouching slaves that timidly peep from behind projecting rocks, or shiver in the damp darkness of caverns, are they indeed the sons of the men who vanquished Sihon king of the Amorites, and Og king of Bashan? Where are the old traditions of victory? Where is the national character—the energy of the race? National character, ancestral traditions, energy of race! Yes; such things exist; they have potency and value. But there is one law higher, wider, deeper than all these, and which modifies and controls them all. It is the everlasting law of right and wrong; the law of conscience; the law of retribution. Israel had forsaken Jehovah and had fallen into the licentious practices of the heathen, therefore they became an easy prey to the spoiler, whose audacity increased, while Israel's strength diminished year by year of that calamitous seven. The same laws are still in force, for the whole world is a theocracy. If we act as the Israelites acted, we shall suffer as they suffered. Spoilers will come upon us—spoilers in the form of tumultuous passions; spoilers in the form of mighty lusts; spoilers in the form of wretched, remorseful thoughts, which will devour our happiness, and make us ready to skulk away into the farthest corner of the darkest cave, to avoid the light of the sun. This irruption of the Midianites into the fruitful vales of Palestine was no accident. The world is not governed by chance. Israel had bowed to the gods of the heathen, therefore they must bow to the tyranny of the heathen. (*L. H. Wiseman, M.A.*) *The Midianite spoilers*:—The narrative of the sacred historian, though brief, gives a vivid picture of the ravages of the Midianites, and of the pitiable distress to which Israel was reduced. They chose the spring when the seed had been sown, and came up with all the accompaniments of Bedouin life, "with their cattle, their tents, and their camels." They ranged over the entire plain, beginning at the bank of the Jordan, and proceeding farther and farther westward "until thou come to Gaza," on the low-lying sandy shore of the Mediterranean. They carried their plundering incursions far up into the hills of Manasseh, of Zebulun, and of Naphtali. They arranged no regular campaign, but pitched their tents wherever they pleased; roaming in armed parties over the whole country, and spreading terror in every direction. The farmers, instead of combining in self-defence, fled to the hills or sheltered themselves in caves; leaving their produce to the robbers, who "destroyed the increase of the earth," carried off the cattle, and "left neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass," nor any kind of sustenance for Israel. After they had plundered all, they withdrew till the following season, when they again came up from the desert, after the seed had been sown, to renew their depredations. For seven successive years were these ravages committed—ravages more terrible than those of war—until the Israelitish people had become not only "greatly impoverished," but utterly disheartened. (*Ibid.*) **The Lord sent a prophet.**—*Divine reproof*:—"Thus saith the Lord . . . ye have not obeyed My voice." Awful words, but not unmixed with mercy. If the wounds of a friend are faithful—if it be a kindness when the righteous smite us—how much more when our heavenly Father is pleased to reprove! Severe and unsympathising as the utterances of this prophet might sound in the ears of a crushed and dejected people, they were a necessary preparation for the coming deliverance. Before the Lord sent them a deliverer, He sent to them a prophet to preach repentance; to remind them that their own disobedience had been the real cause of all their miseries; to prepare them for salvation by piercing them with a sense of sin. It is a mercy if the silence of the

skies is broken, even though it be by the voice of correction. If that word which is like a two-edged sword be humbly and dutifully received, the word which heals and restores will presently follow. Thus it was in Gideon's time; a messenger of reproof prepared the way for a messenger of victory. (*Ibid.*) *The result of disobedience to God's voice*:—God reads the book of history, and says, "See what I did for you, where I found you, how I delivered you, how I interposed for you in the hour of extremity; see how, by a mighty hand and outstretched arm, I wrought out this whole salvation for you, and no sooner did I recover you to life and to hope, than you turned your backs upon Me and stopped your ears with your fingers, and your hearts went astray from My throne." There is, then, a moral explanation of this whole thing that we call difficulty, or pain, or discipline, disappointment, sorrow, and death: "Ye obeyed not My voice." That is the explanation of it all. The explanation of death, pain, poverty, homelessness, friendlessness, sorrow of every degree, is to be found in the fact "that we have disobeyed the voice of God." There has been the moral lapse, the great spiritual slip, the heart has not retained its integrity, and we have got wrong at the centre, and having become disorganised there, all the outwardness of life has gone off into confusion and riot and darkness, and God has justly vindicated Himself by a multitude of pains and penalties, keen distresses and intolerable agonies, all of which are the servants of His righteous and gracious will. How long can God set Himself against the cries of the heart of His people? Not long. Israel cried unto the Lord! Did the Lord remove Himself ten thousand miles further into the depth of the great solitude that is above? No. He is full of compassion, He is tender in mercy, He is gentle in spirit. When Israel cried, God came. Though He might have said, "No," yet He came—for God is love. "He knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are dust." (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Vers. 11–24. There came an Angel of the Lord . . . Gideon threshed wheat.—*Gideon's angelic visitor*:—I. That a man, when actively and unostentatiously doing his duty, is best fitted for the reception of heavenly visitants. II. That, however unconscious of the fact a man may be, God is really quickening him when he is on the path of duty. III. That afflictions are not always proofs of the Divine displeasure, but are frequently sent as incentives to increased exertion on our part. IV. That God's thoughts are not as our thoughts. V. That we should not foolishly and profanely call on God to show us fresh individual signs. VI. That we should offer of our best to God. VII. That our earthly offerings are cleansed by their consecration to God's service. VIII. That the first step in righteousness is to purify the heart from its false idols, and that the second step is to set up in it an altar to the true God. IX. That our earliest efforts towards goodness will probably meet with opposition from our companions. X. That when we are attacked by the scorners, help rises often from the most unexpected quarters. XI. That religion should not be a hindrance to the performance of our duty, or to the enjoyment of any innocent pleasure, but an incentive to both duty and pleasure. XII. That the first result of an angelic visitant to the soul of man, in whatever way through the Holy Spirit's action that visitant may come, is fear; the second result is peace; and the third is immortality. (*R. Young, M.A.*) *Gideon's interview with the angel*:—Amongst the various important lessons which the history of Israel sets before us, none are more plainly marked than this, viz.—I. Sin carries its own punishment. Seven years did this bondage and misery continue. In all that time we do not hear one cry of repentance, nor see one act of faith in the true God, on the part of Israel. They hardened their heart under the sore affliction, and stiffened their neck under the galling yoke. Their sustenance was gone, their enemies held them in cruel subjection, and yet the cause of all the calamity was fostered and maintained; Israel worshipped Baal instead of Jehovah. Oh, how hard the heart becomes when it is in Satan's keeping! But at last, being convinced that no other means would bring relief, "they cried unto the Lord." II. As the first verse of this chapter connects the sin with the punishment, so the seventh verse connects the prayer with the answer: "It came to pass, when Israel cried unto the Lord because of the Midianites, the Lord sent a prophet." He might have said by the voice of that prophet, "It is now too late to cry for deliverance. The door of mercy has been standing open during the seven years of your captivity, and ye would not enter; now it is shut, and ye cannot." But Israel's God was a God "merciful and

gracious, slow to anger, and of great goodness." And now whose history is this? Is it the history of the perverse and rebellious Israelites only? No, it is your history and mine. It is the history of that sin-distressed soul who is now perhaps weeping to hear it told. "Yes," says the penitent man, "it is the account of my past life: I served other gods, I went astray, I did very wickedly year after year; I hardened myself even against His chastening hand; and it was of His mercy that I was not then consumed. But He let me alone, one year after another; till at length I began to think that for all these things God would bring me into judgment; I cried unto the Lord, and He heard me. He might have frowned me from His presence; He might have upbraided me for my long rebellion; but like the tender father of the prodigal son, He welcomed me back." But when God had heard the cry of penitent Israel, and had determined to come down to deliver them, what were the means taken for this purpose? It is a national concern: shall not the chief men of the nation receive the first intimation of it? It is a matter of general importance: shall not immediate publicity be given to it? No, the Lord's way is not as ours; He is pleased to do it in a manner which shall show that He can raise up any instrument, and work by any means, in order that the pride of man may be abased, that the glory of the deliverance may be all His own, and that He alone may be exalted. He comes to a poor humble individual; and the beginning of the mighty work which He was about to perform is told us in these simple words: "There came an angel of the Lord, and sat under an oak that was in Ophrah." We mark next some points in Gideon's character. 1. His consistency and decision. Notwithstanding his retired situation, he had testified, it seems, against the prevailing idolatry; and even in his father's house had kept himself from his father's sins. Let it comfort those who are serving God alone in their families to think of Gideon and God's favour towards him. You are not alone; and "greater is He that is with you than they that are against you." 2. Mark, next, Gideon's ardent patriotism. He does not distinguish himself from the rest of Israel, though God does. He identifies himself with his country. His thoughts were bent upon the welfare of Israel, as his prayers were offered up for it. It would be well if we were to endeavour, in our individual capacity, while walking humbly with our God, to serve the land in which we live. We may not be called to fight her battles, but we can pray for the peace of our Jerusalem. We may not be called to high public situations in life, but we may do private good, both temporal and spiritual. We have all a talent to exercise and to account for. Oh, see to it, that by your means your country is in some measure benefited. 3. Lastly, we are told from whence Gideon's might and valour were derived: "The Lord looked on him," and said, "Go in this thy might, and I will be with thee; and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man." "The Lord looked on him." Oh! what a look was that! what a smile of encouragement cast on Gideon by his God! what a token of love! what a communication of strength and faith! "Go in this thy might," says the angel, "I will be with thee." Gideon need not any longer doubt or hesitate, after such encouragement as this. It is the word of the Lord; and Gideon has only to cast himself upon it in simple faith, and to act according to its precepts. May we be as sensible of our own insufficiency as Gideon was of his: and, at the same time, as "strong" as he was "in the Lord, and in the power of His might," and may the Lord look upon you as He did upon Gideon, in mercy! (*F. Elwin.*) *Gideon's triumph*:—I. THE DISTRESS OF GOD'S PEOPLE IS CAUSED BY THEIR OWN SIN. God turns His forces against those who forget Him, and makes use of those who are His own foes to punish His own people. II. GOD CAN ALWAYS RAISE UP INSTRUMENTS TO ACCOMPLISH HIS PURPOSES WHEN HE NEEDS. III. THE UTILITY AND THE STRENGTH DEPEND ON THE CALL OF GOD. IV. HUMILITY IS THE DISTINGUISHING MARK OF THE BRAVE. How seldom do men deprecate their own importance! To form a low estimate of our own abilities not only keeps us from the danger of pride with its attendant snares, but is a test of character. It is not the learned who are proud, nor the skilful, nor the wise. The empty head, like the empty drum, makes the most noise. V. THE SERVICE OF GOD DEMANDS UNRESTRICTED DEVOTION TO HIS CAUSE. VI. HOWEVER VALUABLE THE SERVICES OF THE AGENT MAY BE, GOD CLAIMS, AS HIS JUST DUE, THE GLORY OF THE TRANSACTION. VII. WE CANNOT DOUBT OF SUCCESS WHEN GOD TAKES A MATTER IN HAND, AND GIVES HIS PROMISE OF AID. (*Homilist.*) *Gideon's call to service*:—This ancient history carries us back to a period when God's Israel was in poverty and want. It was not the action of laws passed in the interests of landowners which led to their misery; it came through the oppression of a foreign foe, whose merciless treatment of the people scarcely left them the means

of life. "They did evil in the sight of the Lord" may be written across the history of most suffering and sadness. This is the tap-root of much of our suffering and inconvenience. This is the poison which destroys our life. I. THE TEXT SAYS IT WAS AN ANGEL WHICH CAME TO CALL GIDEON. II. NOTICE HOW THE ANGEL FOUND GIDEON ENGAGED WHEN HE CAME TO CALL HIM. The angel found Gideon at work. Work is honourable. God has often put honour upon the lowly worker. Let no man say that work is degrading, that work is low; to be an idler, to be a drone, is to be dishonoured. III. SEE THE ANGEL'S ESTIMATE OF GIDEON. The angel addressed Gideon as "thou mighty man of valour." What! A man in apparent poverty; a man threshing a bit of wheat with his own strength; a man having to prepare his very food in secret, lest it should be stolen; that man called by the angel a mighty man of valour! Poor, yet valiant! "Ah," but you say, "that belongs to an old world time. We have altered all this now." Yes, indeed, we have made some changes, and changes which have not always been for the better. We call men noble now who are often ignoble. It is about time that we recognised to the full that poor men may be valiant men, and that lowly men may be noble men. 'Tis only noble to be good. Thousands of people, like Gideon, toil in secret, and are not known to fame, but are among the valiant and the mighty. Earth's scroll has no page for their names in golden writing, but the angels of God have written them down in the Lamb's book of life in heaven. IV. GIDEON'S COMPLAINT TO THE ANGEL. I suppose we all find it easy to thank God and see God with us when all goes well. But wait until the lark sinks songless to his nest, and the path of life becomes a wearisome journey, filled with stones and thorns; wait until sickness, sorrow, and bereavement enter the dwelling; wait until the man stands in the darkness of a foggy night of pain, loss, and despair; how does he act then? How did you act when you were in this condition? Were you any better than Gideon? Could you see the Lord in it? And yet few things are more true in the experience of good men than the presence of God and the love of God in the loss and pain. (*C. Leach, D.D.*) **The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.**—*The man of valour*:—1. That valour does not despise lowly but necessary occupations. 2. That valour is not incompatible with caution. 3. That valour may have its misgivings. 4. That valour may walk in the darkness of the Divine hidings. I. VALOUR IS A DIVINE GIFT. II. VALOUR IS DEVELOPED BY THE DIVINE PRESENCE. III. VALOUR IS MORE ENLARGED BY THE DIVINE VISION. IV. VALOUR FEELS A SUBLIME AWE. Fear God in order to be delivered from all false human fear. V. VALOUR IS PROMPT TO OBEY. Moral hindrances must be removed before material success can be secured. VI. VALOUR BRAVES THE CONSEQUENCES. Duty is ours, results are God's. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*) *Invisible might*:—I. VALOUR UNKNOWN. Gideon was pronounced by the angel who appeared unto him as "a mighty man of valour." But did Gideon know his own might? It would seem that, as a valorous man, he was as much unknown to himself as he was unknown to Israel or to his enemies. His valour was real, but untried. His valour was living, but dormant. His valour was mighty, but unexercised. Oft, too, is valorous faith unknown until it is tried. Great occasions make great men. Great trials make great believers. Faith as a grain of mustard-seed is as strong in its principle as is the faith which moves a mountain. But it needs growth and development. Unconscious strength is often the most potent. You cannot cast him down who is already low. You cannot rend him from the Rock of Ages who is resting on Christ as "the chief of sinners." There is unspeakable comfort in the fact that this "man of valour" was unconscious of his might until the angel revealed to him his secret power. Many a faint-hearted believer is "overcoming the world" (1 John v. 4, 5) unconsciously to himself. His might is hidden, but it is no less real. II. VALOUR'S WEAKNESS. The sun is often under a cloud. So is faith. The cloud, however, does not change the nature of the sun. Nor do beclouding dispensations, which chill the soul, affect the true nature of its faith. The Christian is often a paradox to himself. He is weak and strong at the same moment. "When I am weak, then am I strong," said one of the greatest believers. "It is the nature of faith, not the quantity, which determines the character," said an eminent divine; and he added, "Samson was a riddle to me till I unriddled myself. He was an inconsistent believer." Gideon is named with Samson among the mighty believers in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. We shall now see his inconsistent weakness. The causes of it are laid open before us. 1. He was now walking by sight, and not by faith. He could see no tokens of the Lord's presence; and therefore, in reply to the salutation, "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour," he said, in the weakness of unbelief, "Oh! my Lord,

if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us?" Once suffer doubt to hint at the bare possibility that it may not be exactly true in all cases, at all times, that "God is not a man, that He should lie," and faith will lose its foothold, and stumble. 2. Gideon overlooked God's justice and man's sin. "Why then is all this befallen us?" The reason was patent. Surely Gideon could not have closed his eyes to all the idolatry in the land! The chastisement of the Lord's people may often be traced up to the same cause. Does the afflicted child of God ask, "Why is all this befallen me?" He need not question the cause. It is not because the Lord is not with him. Far from it. It is the true vine that is purged. The barren fig-tree is plucked up by the roots and cast away. But there is some evil permitted, some idol worshipped, some idolatrous altar erected. 3. Hard thoughts of God were mixed with Gideon's faith. "Now the Lord hath forsaken us," he murmured. Was this true? The Lord had just sent a prophet to them, in answer to their prayer (vers. 7, 8). Israel had forsaken the Lord, but the Lord had not forsaken Israel. His rod over them proved that He had not given them over to their sins. 4. False humility was another ingredient in the weak faith of Gideon. "Thou shalt save Israel," said the Lord: "have not I sent thee?" This twofold promise should have been enough for any emergency. What could a creature need more? But Gideon, instead of fixing his eye of faith upon the Lord alone, began to think of himself. And he said, in reply, "O Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house" (ver. 15). Wherein would his confidence have been placed had his family been the richest in Manasseh and he the greatest in his father's house? There was a leaning to the arm of flesh in all this. "Proud humility" is a fearful bane of the soul. It apes the most retiring and modest graces of the Spirit; but it usurps the throne and sovereignty of Jehovah. Under its mask Satan robs believers of their comfort and the Church of their zeal. Were the creature made nothing, and Jehovah everything, what Goliath could resist the sling and the stone of the veriest stripling? III. But now we turn and behold VALOUR'S MIGHT. Gideon was "a mighty man of valour" notwithstanding all the weakness of his faith. We naturally ask, wherein was his might? What was its source? In himself he was as weak as a babe. 1. The Lord's presence was one great source of valour's might. "The Lord is with thee." "Surely I will be with thee." Here was might irresistible. No enemy can withstand the presence of the Lord. 2. The Lord's look was another source of valour's might. "The Lord looked upon Gideon, and said, Go in this thy might." The Lord's look of grace and love imparts strength to the soul. 3. The Lord's promise was one chief source of valour's might. Faith lives upon promise. It is its food and daily sustenance. It is the very sinew of its might. "Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man." "Thou shalt save Israel." These were the promises with which Gideon was to wage war and overcome. Promise is to faith what the rope is to the drowning man. Faith begins to rise from despair to hope by promise. Promise, descending into the heart of faith, rises like water to its own level, and upbears the reposing soul to the very throne and bosom of God. Promise, like light issuing from the sun, cannot be polluted by earth's contamination. It is pure in whatever degree it shineth. It cometh from one source, and tendeth to one end. 4. The command of the Lord, no less than promise, was the warrant of faith, and a chief source of valour's might. "Go," saith the Lord. "Have not I sent thee?" The Captain of our salvation speaks as one having authority. Who can resist His will? Does He say, "Go"? Who, then, shall be able to let, or hinder, the servant in doing his Master's behest? Does he say, "Go," without providing "grace and strength" equal to the need of going? True faith is an obedient grace. Let but the Lord issue His command, and faith will answer, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth." (*G. A. Rogers, M.A.*) **If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us?**—*Gideon's attitude partly right and partly wrong*:—He was right in refusing to believe God was present if things went on just as if He were not present, but he was wrong in not seeing what it was that prevented God from being present. He was right in arguing, "What God was, He is; why then does He not do for us what He did for our fathers?" He was right in debating with himself, and asking "Is this what it means to be God's people? What is the use of living at this price?" But he was wrong in thinking that the fault lay with God, and not with himself; wrong in not seeing his very obvious duty, which, until he performed, God could not be expected to work for Israel. Just so we are right in refusing to accept a religion which makes no practical difference upon us; right in impatiently

throwing aside the mere traditional assurances whereby men soothe sinners and promise them deliverance; right in looking straight at the facts of our own experience, and testing religion by its power on ourselves; but we often add to this the mistake of Gideon, and fall out with God for not interfering more powerfully in our behalf, when it is we ourselves who are preventing Him from so interfering. You wait for God to do something, while He is waiting for you. If you are not able to use God's strength, if you might as well be heathen for all the moral help you get from God, then depend upon it there is something wrong in your conduct towards God, some plain duty you are neglecting. (*Marcus Dods, D.D.*) *Gideon's lament*:—Can we not catch some echoes of Gideon's complaint in the thoughts that are cherished among ourselves? That God wrought wonders once, that He raised up men to open new views of His truth and of His will and thus renewed the Church's strength, and sent her forth conquering and to conquer—all this we hold, of course. We call the man who doubts it an infidel or a heretic. But the man who believes that similar things may take place in our day, who believes, for instance, that God makes His will as plain in ways suited to our time as He did in other ways at former times—does not such a man run great risk of being called an enthusiast or a fool? That any man now may be guided in actual fact, and guided unerringly, by God in common life, or that things going on among us may be as important and as Divine as what was done in any former age, is an assertion that few would dare to make. If we are sensible of the strange contradiction implied in our thus demanding credence for such things in the past as we deny the very possibility of in the present, we shall the better understand Gideon's state of mind when the angel of the Lord appeared to him. (*W. Miller, M.A.*) *How to treat doubters*:—"God be with you!" said the stranger. Gideon flung down his flail. "God be with us? Don't talk nonsense, man! Would I be skulking in this wine-press, would we Hebrews be cowering before those pagan Midianites, if God were with us? They say God was with us when we came out of Egypt, and that He did great miracles when Joshua conquered this land. Ah! if that is true, then He has gone away and left us now. Don't talk to me about God, when facts prove that there is no God with us." How do you think a modern minister of the orthodox type would have treated a man who had spoken in that fashion about God? Not as the angel treated Gideon. I fear the modern minister would have said, "Here is a most dangerous, blasphemous sceptic, all wrong in his views, full of heretical, unsettling, dangerous feelings and ideas"; and he would have sought to argue with him and to put him right. What did the angel? He looked at him, knew he was wrong in blaming God in that fashion, but also that he was right to refuse to accept a religion that had lost all its nobility and bravery, that had no backbone in it. The angel said: "Go in this thy might, thy spirit that cannot tolerate this degradation of God's people, that rises against this wrong; go thou, and be the leader in Jehovah's name, and set things right." The Church would be a good deal wiser if it always took care to distinguish between the doubt of corruption and worldliness, the cold, callous, sneering doubt, and the doubt of a brave young heart that doubts because religion is so poor an affair, that doubts because of the great wrongs in the world, because of the deeds of evil that sin works, that doubts precisely because it is crying for the reality. We should go to every such man and say: "My brother, you are not an infidel; you are called to be a religious man beyond the common. You are not an atheist. God has hold of you, and wants you for Himself. Go and do something heroic, and show that God's religion is the mightiest force. Go and demand the reality, and win a victory for God and His kingdom such as the world has never seen yet." (*Prof. G. A Smith.*) *Brotherhood illustrated by Gideon's reply*:—There is here an example of largeness in heart and mind which we ought not to miss, especially because it sets before us a principle often unrecognised. It is clear enough that Gideon could not enjoy freedom unless his country was free, for no man can be safe in an enslaved land; but many fail to see that spiritual redemption in like manner cannot be enjoyed by one unless others are moving towards the light. Truly salvation is personal at first and personal at last; but it is never an individual affair only. Each for himself must hear and answer the Divine call to repentance; each as a moral unit must enter the strait gate, press along the narrow way of life, agonise and overcome. But the redemption of one soul is part of a vast redeeming purpose, and the fibres of each life are interwoven with those of other lives far and wide. Spiritual brotherhood is a fact but faintly typified by the brotherhood of the Hebrews, and the struggling soul to-day, like Gideon's long ago, must know God as the Saviour

of all men before a personal hope can be enjoyed worth the having. As Gideon showed himself to have the Lord with him by a question charged not with individual anxiety but with keen interest in the nation, so a man now is seen to have the Spirit of God as he exhibits a passion for the regeneration of the world. Salvation is enlargement of soul, devotion to God, and to man for the sake of God. If any one thinks he is saved while he bears no burdens for others, makes no steady effort to liberate souls from the tyranny of the false and the vile, he is in fatal error. The salvation of Christ plants always in men and women His mind, His law of life, who is the Brother and Friend of all. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*) *Providence not to be judged from a narrow point of view*:—Crossing the great deep at night, lying sleeplessly and perhaps painfully in your berth, longing for the light without much hope that it will bring you comfort, what hear you? The surge of the water, the moan of the wind, and the tinkle of a bell. That bell has no sooner told its tale of time than a voice in a sing-song tone says, "All's well, all's well!" It is the man on the look-out. You say: "How can all be well when I am not sleeping? How can all be well when I am sick and in pain? How can all be well when I am not at home, and the children are longing for me?" There is a higher law than your sleeplessness, your pain, and your child's desire for your presence. Within those limits you are right—all is not well—but in the higher sphere, that takes in a larger area and commands a wider outlook, all's well, all's well. So it is with this marvellous mystery, this strange providence. "I am sick, and tired, and heart-broken, misunderstood, and belied, and slandered, and ill-fed, and battered down," saith the Christian man, but the angel on the look-out says, "All's well, all's well!" The vessel has her face straight home, and the sea is yielding to give her passageway. "All's well, all's well." (*J. Parker, D.D.*) **The Lord looked upon him.**—*The look of God*:—I. THE CHIEF FEATURES OF SUCH LOOKS. 1. An implied promise (Jer. xxiv. 6). 2. An implied encouragement. 3. An implied help. II. THE CHIEF CONDITIONS FOR THEIR BESTOWAL. 1. Cultivation of various graces—love and obedience, contrition and reverence, godliness, hope, and uprightness. 2. Attitude of expectancy. If God is looking down to bless us, we must look up to meet His gaze. Our attitude must be, "As the eyes," &c. Our determination must be, "In the morning will I," &c. Then our history will be, "They looked unto Him," &c. III. THE CHIEF PURPOSE OF THESE LOOKS—accompanied by a command: "Go." Do you ask, where? Go anew and daily, in faith and penitence, to a Father's footstool, and as by faith you know He is looking graciously on you in Christ, go to the discharge of your daily duties in the might of His strengthening grace, and the Lord will go before you. Go through the obstacles which have hitherto impeded you. (*Homilist.*) *A look, a word, and a question*:—I. What a LOOK was that which the Lord gave to Gideon! He looked him out of his discouragements into a holy bravery. If our look to the Lord saves us, what will not His look at us do? Lord, look on me this day, and nerve me for its duties and conflicts. II. What a WORD was this which Jehovah spake to Gideon! "Go." He must not hesitate. He might have answered, "What, go in all this weakness?" But the Lord put that word out of court by saying, "Go in this thy might." The Lord had looked might into him, and he had now nothing to do but to use it, and save Israel by smiting the Midianites. It may be that the Lord has more to do by me than I ever dreamed of. If He has looked upon me He has made me strong. Let me by faith exercise the power with which He has entrusted me. He never bids me "idle away my time in this my might." Far from it. I must "go," because He strengthens me. III. What a QUESTION is that which the Lord puts to me, even as He put it to Gideon! "Have not I sent thee?" Yes, Lord, Thou hast sent me, and I will go in Thy strength. At Thy command I go, and, going, I am assured that Thou wilt conquer by me. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) **Go in this thy might . . . have not I sent thee?**—*Gideon's commission*:—I. THE SANCTION GIVEN: "The Lord looked upon him." Oh, what a mercy! His father might have looked upon him long enough, and surnamed him Jerubbaal or what he pleased, but it would have been no use unless the Lord had looked upon him. But there are many senses in which the Lord looks upon His people, and upon His enemies too. He looked upon the affliction of His people in Egypt: "I have looked upon them, and have come down to deliver them." He looked upon David in all his affliction. Then, again, you will remember how the Lord looked upon Peter. What a significant and expressive look! But, to put these matters a little more into form, mark, first of all, that Gideon seemed as if he would avoid all lookers-on. He was withdrawn from observation. Some of the sweetest seasons in

which God looks upon His people are when they are retired. And hence the direction given by our blessed Lord, "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet," &c. Now just look again at this great sanction from above. While Jehovah looks from His high throne upon the objects of His love to inspire them for His special work and for the great objects to which He has appointed them, He withdraws their affections from other objects and leads them forth with an ardent desire to glorify God in His work. II. THE COMMAND: "Go in this thy might." Why, I do not know that Gideon had confessed to possess any might; on the contrary, he had concealed himself from time to time from all those very enemies he was about to vanquish. He said unto the Lord, "Wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." Well, now, if I first of all view this as typical of Christ, did not He spring from a poor family? Yet He was the "Captain of the Lord's host." But—mark this—all glory to His name, it was His own essential might. I beseech you, lose not sight of this all-important fact, to which, I think, Gideon's history points typically—that Christ had the whole matter with regard to the salvation of His Church entrusted to His care; therefore is it written, that He hath "laid help upon one that is mighty and exalted—one chosen out of the people." I come to the secondary view—I mean the sending of God's own servants; because, while I allow no efficiency whatever to be ascribed to them, yet are they instrumentally employed for the express purpose of saving Israel out of the hands of the Midianites. Now, have you not Omnipotence pledged in your personal experience? If you have not you have got no experience at all. It was Omnipotence that broke your hearts, and subdued you at the feet of Jesus. God humbles the sinner thus; He lays us low, strips us of all confidence, makes us deeply conscious of creature-weakness and insufficiency, so as not to be sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; and then we get the pledge of Omnipotence on our side. We may well go forth thus to the war armed with strength—"Go in this thy might." Well, but how could it be said to be his? Why, what is freer than a gift? It was given him—it was his might—"in this thy might." No man is strong but he who is strong in Jehovah's might. III. THE PROMISE OF SUCCESS: "And thou shalt save Israel from the hands of the Midianites"—cruel and vexatious, always to be wanting the territories of Israel. I must here refer you back again to the commandment of God at an earlier period than this with regard to these Midianites. After Balaam had instructed Balak how to seduce God's Israel, the commandment came from the Lord, "Vex the Midianites and smite them, for they vex you with their wiles." Here we might include in this vast multitude, "like grasshoppers for number," all the opposers of God's gospel, all the enemies of His Cross. But to bring this matter nearer home. The Midianites that every Christian has to contend with he finds in his own camp, in his own tent, within his own heart. Now mark the simple process of the war. I do not read that there was a weapon of war in any of their hands, but they were to go forth under the simple direction of Gideon. Now look at their weapons. Each man was to have a trumpet, a pitcher and a lamp inside. Pretty things to go to war with, truly! Well, then, but while we glance at the simplicity of the means thus employed, and the cry that went forth, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" mark that the Midianites all fled. (*J. Irons.*)

Gideon's might:—In Gideon's attitude of mind a human observer would have seen nothing but weakness, and yet God saw "might." The Divine eye penetrated to the very depths of Gideon's spirit and character, and saw in his seeming weakness the very qualities out of which spiritual heroes are made. For in spiritual achievements a man is mighty in proportion to his capacity to receive Divine help, just as a steam-engine is mighty in proportion to its capacity to receive and utilise the largest possible amount of steam. Gideon's might, then, consisted—1. In his whole-hearted loyalty to God. He was evidently among the few who remained true to Jehovah. And his first act was to strike a blow at the idolatry of the land. The first condition of spiritual strength and success is to give our hearts to God in profound loyalty. There is an idolatry of the spirit which must be put away before we can do any work for God. 2. In his humble dependence upon God. Gideon's touching confession of his own insufficiency reminds us that this spirit is characteristic of the great men of the Bible—Moses (Exod. iii. 11), Jeremiah (i. 6, 7), Paul (Eph. iii. 8). Out of conscious weakness these men were made strong for the work to which they had been called. God has often chosen "the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty." 3. In his profound faith in God. Gideon is mentioned in Heb. xi. as one of those who

"through faith . . . out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." God tenderly nourished it by giving signs of encouragement—sacrifice consumed, wet and dry fleece, visit to the Midianites' camp—until it was strong enough to venture on the perilous enterprise with the little band of three hundred men. 4. In his consciousness of a Divine mission. "Have not I sent thee?" (ver. 14). This is God's answer to human weakness shrinking from a difficult and dangerous task. When a man realises this he possesses a might not his own (John xvii. 18). There was not only a Divine commission, but also a promise of the Divine presence: "Surely I will be with thee" (ver. 16). But still something more was needed, and that was the touch of the Spirit. "The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon." (*J. T. Hamly.*) *God's call, and the response to it:*—It is the call of God that ripens a life into power, resolve, fruitfulness—the call and the response to it. Continually the Bible urges upon us this great truth, that through the keen sense of a close personal relation to God and of duty owing to Him the soul grows and comes to its own. Our human personality is created in that way, and in no other. There are, indeed, lives which are not so inspired and yet appear strong; an ingenious, resolute selfishness gives them momentum. But this individuality is akin to that of ape or tiger; it is a part of the earth force, in yielding to which a man forfeits his proper being and dignity. Look at Napoleon, the supreme example in history of this failure. A great genius, a striking character! Only in the carnal region, for human personality is moral, spiritual, and the most triumphant cunning does not make a man; while on the other hand from a very moderate endowment put to the glorious usury of God's service will grow a soul clear, brave, and firm, precious in the ranks of life. Let a human being, however ignorant and low, hear and answer the Divine summons, and in that place a man appears, one who stands related to the source of strength and light. And when a man, roused by such a call, feels responsibility for his country, for religion, the hero is astir. Something will be done for which mankind waits. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*) *Gideon's obedience to God's call:*—Gideon, observe, was not unwilling to go forward in the cause of God and God's people; on the contrary, he was most ready to do so; but without an outward call he never would have taken the lead. Nevertheless, when the call was repeated and so made plain, no account was made of difficulties. In full view of them Gideon determined to obey. Now he evidently had no suspicion yet of the supernatural character of his visitor. It was not, therefore, any sign from heaven that compelled him to crush down his hesitation. It was the inward voice of conscience, awakened by what he believed to be an ordinary communication from God, that led him on. He asked, indeed, for a sign from heaven, but it was to strengthen him to keep his resolution, not to enable him to form it. Here was the true spirit of faith. Here was the root of the success that came so gloriously afterwards. Submission, consent when once God's will is known; resolution to do that will in spite of difficulties—that is the spirit to which signs are given; that is the spirit by which success is won. The man or the Church that makes visible success, or signs of any kind, a condition of bending all their energy to the doing of God's will, is not among those by whom deliverance is wrought or the families of the earth blessed. To those who yield, like Gideon, to the will of God so soon as it is made clear, signs of acceptance and encouragement come thereafter, and often come with but small delay. (*W. Miller, M.A.*) Surely I will be with thee.—*The Divine afflatus:*—Whatever ground there was for taking exception to Gideon's faith in God, this, at all events, there seems to be every reason to believe, that he had learned to refer all success to the presence and blessing of the Lord. The language he employs (ver. 13) necessarily implies this. But still much required to be done before he should be qualified to act the distinguished part for which he was destined; and accordingly we are informed (ver. 14) that by some method here unexplained—some secret and mysterious afflatus of the Spirit imparted on that occasion—it pleased the Lord to make up what was wanting in his faith, and in whatever else was still manifestly defective. The Lord looked upon him! Ah! who knows what was in that look! It was not a look of anger or displeasure. It was not a mere look of compassion, nor of benevolence and favour. There seems to have been something above nature in it, not unlike that memorable glance with which Jesus smote Peter to the heart, so that he rushed out of the house and wept bitterly; the influence which accompanied the "look" which the Lord cast on Gideon was of a different character, indeed, but it was not less potential. It was Gideon's commission. Along with it seems to have come all the wisdom, all the might, all the

valour, all the strategic skill which he needed in order to fit him for the grand expedition in which he was soon to act so prominent a part. Let us learn the following important practical lessons:—1. The Lord often anticipates the desires of His people, and grants them what they need even before they ask it. Indeed, in every case He may be said, in one sense, to give before we ask, because if He did not by His Holy Spirit vouchsafe unto us grace to pray, which of us would ever pray for grace? But if He is so ready to grant before we ask, how much more is He ready to grant when we do ask in faith all things whatsoever we require. 2. A lowly sense of our own deserts is at once a sign that exaltation is at hand, the way to it, and the occasion of it. Diffidence, humility, modesty, unobtrusiveness, are among the highest recommendations in the sight of God. He "resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." "Before honour is humility, and pride goeth before a fall." 3. If we be indeed of the true Israel of God, we may rest assured that the Lord will be with us, and cause us to triumph over all our foes. 4. It is unbecoming the Christian to be too anxious or too careful about the designs of God concerning him. To Gideon's question, "Wherewith shall I save Israel?" no explicit answer, it will be remembered, was vouchsafed. His curiosity was rebuked as a sign of remaining unbelief. Let us repose like little children in the bosom of the Father's promise. (*W. W. Duncan, M.A.*) **Thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.**—*War*:—What shall we say as to the moral character of this transaction? We must not let our affection or veneration for old traditions blind us to the difficulty of the question. But common sense has suggested to me one or two considerations. First of all, our judgment is apt to be prejudiced here, because men in our time, we English people in particular, have come to think rather falsely about war. A profounder apprehension of the lovely Christlike spirit of our religion, coupled with a good many less worthy influences, such as the peaceableness and security of our sea-girt life in these isles, have all combined to give us a great horror of war; not because of the sin and iniquity of it, but because it means wounds and bloodshed, and robbery of our property and death. Now indubitably every rational man will say that, were our world free from selfishness and sin, war could not exist in it. Therefore it has its roots in iniquity. Nevertheless, like many other things that are evils in themselves, war may be used, under God's providential government of the world, to cure worse evils, acting remedially like the surgeon's knife, and bringing renewed life to the nation and the individual. In the second place, I wish to add another consideration. I venture to say that all of us, in our historical judgment and in our ethical and religious teaching, probably have fallen into error, in that we overvalue mere physical human life. If anything is manifest in this world, it is that the material life counts for very little in God's sight; that the material life is mere scaffolding, the machinery by which or the platform on which the mental, moral, and ethical life is to be built up. Over and over again, in the pathological history of our human race, we find that God has sacrificed millions of lives to compel men to be pure and dignified in their bodily and moral habits. Apply this to war. Though it be a scourge and an exterminator, it has nevertheless a wonderful potential force in it to produce bravery, courage, ability of every description. War may thus be used to elevate the moral and mental worth of our race. I fear it is our tendency in the present day to make too much of physical comfort and physical life. On that account we recoil unduly when God has wrought out benefit for our race as a whole through terrible trial, affliction, discipline, suffering, and self-sacrifice; as, for example, by wars in which cruel despotisms, tyrannous, inferior, and sanguinary races have succumbed before superior moral or mental worth. I am afraid, too, we do not deal out fair measure to our predecessors. We are ready to censure these Hebrews for the cruel treatment they often meted out to prisoners of war. We are apt to say that the men who did such things could not, along with such a low moral character, have possessed a lofty, pure revelation of God or a knowledge of His character. But that is too hasty a judgment. Similarly we take a socialist book, describing life in the last generation, or in the present generation, in our England; we read the history of the horrors that produced the Factory Acts—how the wealthy capitalist lived in luxury, and grudged a diminution of his income that would have made the condition of workshops and the hours of labour such as would have averted the premature death of their operatives, of men, women, and children, until Parliament stepped in. We say those men who occupied the position of capitalists were fiends. But they were nothing of the kind; some of them were even eminent Christians. But Christianity had got into cursed blindness and ignorance on these points, and they

belonged to their day and generation. At present, are we so very far above them? Is it not the fact that constantly you have great outbreaks of small-pox or scarlet fever spreading death in a hundred households which are due solely to carelessly scamped work? Have we not the horrors of the East End, and the City, and so on? But are we therefore all bad men? Not so. We are Christians in process of growing. These are evils we are only waking up to discover, the sins we have inherited, the Canaanites we have to destroy. If we apply the same measure to the Hebrews, we see that there was a real progress, a real working for good in a society that, in certain moral aspects, was low and degraded. Then again, as a matter of fact, the God that made our world has made this law, that wherever sin of a certain type and degree has come in, the retribution of moral obliquity and degradation has come in also, in the shape of annihilation at the hands of a superior race. That seems a cruel, hard thing; but nevertheless so it is. Moreover, to make it more mysterious, the conquering race is not always a superior race in the perfect sense. But we have not that complication here, for all old history testifies that the most blighting curse of false religion and the vilest sensuality of our world in these days lay in the religion of those Canaanites. Even classic, pagan writers say that blank atheism would have been better than that. Wherever Phœnicians established their colonies and their places of worship they introduced nameless vices and uncleannesses, and dignified them with the name of religion. And where these things were introduced they spread, so much so that the end of the great Roman empire was hastened, its old martial strength was rooted out, by the corruption that came in a direct line from that old Canaanitish religion. To justify what was done, therefore, we do not need to say that the conquerors were perfect and immaculate. All we need to be able to say is, that it was a deserved retribution, and that it was better for our world that Canaan should pass into the hands of the Hebrew nation, which has done the grandest moral and religious work for the world. (*Prof. G. A. Smith.*)

Shew me a sign that Thou talkest with me.—*The sign:*—When the Lord Jesus had risen from the dead, and first appeared to His disciples, "they believed not for joy, and wondered." Their doubts, however, were soon removed by the sign which the Lord afforded them (Luke xxiv. 41–43). We may well imagine that the feelings of Gideon were not altogether dissimilar to those of the disciples of our Lord, when the angel "looked upon him and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?" These tidings were so welcome, and yet so marvellous, that Gideon's faith staggered. He "believed not for joy, and wondered." And then he sought "a sign," to satisfy himself that he was in a waking state, that his senses were not deceiving him, and that the angel was not a mere phantom called up by a heated imagination. "Shew me a sign that Thou talkest with me." Now, the sign which was given to Gideon was not altogether unlike in character to the sign which our blessed Lord gave to His disciples on His resurrection-morn. In both cases the emblems of peace and friendship were presented. In both cases the offering was accepted. In both cases it was consumed. Now, do not we need some sign that the Lord talketh with us, and hath come down to "save us from the hand of our enemies"? Our enemies are many and powerful. We need not now some audible voice, nor midnight dream, nor open vision, to assure us of pardon and salvation. Jesus Himself has given us a sign. We see it on Calvary's hill. Let us draw near and see this great sight. I. Mark that this sign which Gideon received, was AN APPEAL TO THE SENSES. Man is a compound being. God deals with him as such. There is not a faculty nor a gift with which man is endowed to which God does not appeal in the great matter of salvation. This is an important consideration. We are too apt to regard the atonement as a mere matter of faith. We believe it is something more; something greater, and something less. Gideon wished for a sign which his own hands could handle and his own eyes could see. God granted him this sign—a sign, be it remembered, of greater things promised. Now it is just this sign, or this appeal to the senses, which appears in the atonement of our Lord. One voice throughout the whole life and death and resurrection of Jesus seems to say, "Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself" (Luke xxiv. 39). It is true that our own individual eyes have not seen Him, nor have our own ears heard Him speak, nor have our own hands handled His pierced side, but our fathers have had all these their senses satisfied—they saw, they heard, they handled, they believed, and they were saved. And is not this enough? "Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed." Do we not receive the testimony of credible witnesses upon other matters of bygone fact? Through the senses of others, who lived ages ago,

we embrace the facts recorded of ancient sages, of conquerors, of emperors. The great and the noble dead live over again in our minds. We should be held incredulous and inexcusable were we to throw aside all credible history because our own eyes could not test its accuracy. And what excuse shall we find in heaven if we reject or slight the testimony of others on the matter of salvation? But if, on the contrary, we embrace the sign which God has given us, and rely upon the wondrous facts of which they are signs, we then set to our seal that God is true. This is believing. This is acting faith in God. We trust God. We honour God. Our senses harmonise with the faculties of our soul. II. We notice THAT THIS SIGN WHICH THE LORD GAVE UNTO GIDEON WAS A CONFIRMATION OF PROMISES. The promises made to this mighty man of valour were of a twofold nature, as emphatically expressed in the fourteenth verse, "The Lord said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man." The Lord's presence and the Lord's deliverance were united. They always are so. They are inseparable. If the Lord be not with us, in vain shall we go forth against the Midianites. But "if the Lord be" with us, "none can prevail against us." Salvation, both present and eternal, is included in the promise, "I will be with thee." It is just this promise and blessing which are embodied in the name Jesus which bears the same interpretation as "Immanuel," "God with us." III. THE SIGN VOUCHSAFED TO GIDEON WAS ALSO AN EVIDENCE OF THINGS NOT SEEN. It was an appeal to sense to strengthen faith. It proved to him that He who appeared as a man "under the oak which was in Ophrah" was none other than the Angel of the Lord—even the Angel of the everlasting covenant! It proved, moreover, that Gideon was called of God to deliver Israel. Oh, that he might succeed in the attempt! He had no riches, no name, no influence, no soldiers; but no matter, the Lord was indeed "with him," and that was enough. He would now act up to the title which the Lord had given him, as a "mighty man of valour," and Israel shall be delivered by "the sword of the Lord and of Gideon." Now it is just this faith in an unseen presence and in an unfelt power which saves the soul from spiritual Midianites. Divine power alone is equal to cope with Satanic might. The sinner who wars against his sins, his lusts, his evil passions, his corrupt nature, in his own strength, soon proves his folly and his weakness. As regards all spiritual conquests, one word should at once check the vain conceit of the sinner, and strengthen the faith of the child of God: "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." Look you, then, for any sign that the Lord is with you—that He will deliver you, and make you victorious over all your enemies? Behold that sign upon the hard rock of Calvary! Behold it in that mysterious fire which arose therefrom! Behold it in the utter consumption of the sacrifice! Behold it in the ascent of the Lord Himself from off the altar to His throne of glory! What further sign can you need? (*G. A. Rogers, M.A.*) *Gideon's sacrifice accepted:*—"Give me a sign that Thou talkest with me." It may be said that this hesitation was Gideon's infirmity. Connecting it, however, with the circumstance of its being himself that was called forth to the mighty work of Israel's deliverance, I cannot but consider it as an evidence of his humility. Would to God that all our scruples with regard to engaging in the service of God arose from the same cause! What is the reason that, when we ask the co-operation of many in some labours of the Lord's vineyard, they all, with one accord, begin to make excuse? Is it a humbling sense of their own unfitness for the work? If it were, we have an encouraging text in the Word of God, with which we might do away the difficulty: "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me." But when one goes to his farm, and another to his merchandise—in short, when "men seek their own, and not the things which are Jesus Christ's"—how opposed are their characters to Gideon's, whose only scruple about the work of God was, "What am I, that I should deliver Israel?" And would to God that when humility does appear to be the source of objections to the engaging in the promotion of the cause of religion, that humility were, like Gideon's, real genuine humility, and not the cloak of hypocrisy, not a covering to conceal idleness and indifference. I. On the CIRCUMSTANCE which forms the text we may make two observations, viz., the manner in which the angel tried Gideon's faith, and the manner in which he displayed his own power and Godhead. 1. We notice the manner in which the angel tried Gideon's faith. "He said, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes and lay them upon this rock; and pour out the broth." This was intended to make way for a miracle; that Gideon's faith in the God who wrought it might, after this trial, become strong, according to the work which he was shortly to undertake. It will be remembered that Elijah made way

for the miracle which God was about to work for the confusion of Baal's prophets, by placing the sacrifice in the most unlikely state for consumption by fire. It seems to have been for the same purpose that the angel commanded Gideon to lay the flesh upon the cold rock, and to pour out the broth. All suspicion and all possibility of the communication of fire were to be done away. Gideon obeys, looking for the "sign," and wondering how it shall be given. 2. The manner in which the angel displays his great power and Godhead. He does not offer up prayer for fire from heaven on the sacrifice, as Elijah did. He himself communicates the fire, and makes the sacrifice. How sweet the thought, that when the Christian presents his sacrifice of praise, and prayer, and thanksgiving, there is one who, as his Mediator, can make it acceptable; one who "ever liveth to make intercession," even "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever!" II. Having made these remarks on the circumstance, let us observe THE EFFECT WHICH IT HAD UPON GIDEON'S MIND AND CONDUCT. The effect which it had upon his mind was this: he said, "Alas, O Lord God! for because I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face." There was so much of the majesty of the Godhead in the miracle which the angel had wrought, that the Divinity beamed, as it were, through the appearance of His manhood. Gideon was afraid. It was a received opinion among the Jews that any vision of the Divine glory would be fatal, in consequence of what God had declared to Moses. When Moses said unto the Lord, "I beseech Thee shew me Thy glory," the Lord said unto him, "Thou canst not see My face; for there shall no man see Me and live." But it may be asked, "How was it that Gideon survived the sight?" If it had been said to Moses, "No man shall see My face and live," how did Gideon live? The answer will open to us some precious gospel truths. Gideon saw the glory of God, indeed, but it was "in the face of Jesus Christ." "No man," says St. John, "hath seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." In other words, whenever there has been a manifestation of Jehovah to His creatures, it has been by Jesus Christ, the second person in the ever-blessed Trinity; and it is by His having tabernacled in our flesh that the awful majesty of Jehovah has been softened into mildness and peace and love. The believer's rejoicing is that Jesus is "the brightness of the Father's glory"; and therefore he can look upon it and live; yea, live by looking upon it, and because he looks upon it. "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, O all ye ends of the earth." Mark here the answer of God to Gideon. The Lord said unto him, "Peace be unto thee; fear not; thou shalt not die." We do not now wonder at this gracious answer, after taking into consideration the character of the angel from whom it came. Was it not from Him who "made peace by the blood of His Cross," who is called "our peace" and "the Prince of Peace"? Yes, it was an answer that fitted His priestly and His mediatorial character. But does the impenitent sinner see nothing in this passage which is calculated to affect his mind? Let him think of this—that he shall one day see the "Angel" before whom Gideon trembled; shall see Him as Gideon saw Him, "face to face"; but mark, not veiled, as He was then, in the appearance of a man; not disguised in the garb of lowly human nature, but in the glory which He had before the world was. And mark His character then. He shall come, not to touch a sacrifice, not to work a miracle, not to confirm the faith of an individual, as in the case of Gideon; but "to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe." He shall come to be our Judge. We come now to show, in the last place, the effect which this circumstance had upon Gideon's conduct. "Then Gideon built an altar unto the Lord, and called it Jehovah-shalom." This he did to commemorate the event. It was a day much to be remembered by Gideon, both on his own account and Israel's; and therefore he built this altar. The name which he gave it is beautifully descriptive of the circumstance: "The Lord is my peace"; taking that comfortable assurance which God gave him for the motto to inscribe on it, "Peace be unto thee!" It is remarkable that holy men in former times seem to have been uniformly careful to record their mercies. We may take shame to ourselves for want of a closer imitation. Does the God of battles bless our arms and give us victory? We build a monument to the glory of the conqueror, whom God has honoured as the instrument; but where are the hearts in which an altar of praise is built unto the Lord, and on which is written, "The Lord is my banner"? Does God restore a dear child from the brink of the grave and give him, like Isaac, to his parent's arms again? The parent clasps him to his breast, and says, "This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found"; but how seldom does he remember the mercy by a commemoration of it, like Abraham's "Jehovah-jireh." Does God "give and

preserve to our use the kindly fruits of the earth, so as in due time we may enjoy them"? We begin to pull down our barns and build greater; and to say to our souls, "We have much goods laid up for many years; eat, drink, and be merry! But how few, from Dan to Beersheba, from one end of the country to the other, how few look upon "fields white unto the harvest," and count the sheaves which God has ripened for them, with thankful hearts, and say, "We will raise an Ebenezer, for hitherto the Lord hath helped us!" But there is one character who does record His mercies, and that is the man whose mercies have been of a nature which have effected a change in his heart; melting and subduing what was before hardness, and impenitency, and unbelief, into contrition and gratitude and love. To such a soul this commemorative word of Gideon is a cordial: "Jehovah-shalom: the Lord is my peace." (*F. Elwin.*) *The Christian's peculiar state:*—I. THE CHRISTIAN'S PRIVILEGE. It is to "find grace in the sight of the Lord." 1. A partaking of the Divine nature. Those who have found grace in God's sight have received His grace in their heart. If we are accepted of God we are united to Him by faith in His Son. We become one with Him—are created anew—conformed to the Divine image and bear the image of the heavenly. 2. A reception of the Divine fulness. He is emphatically called the God of all grace. He has all the treasures of grace we stand in need of; so that if we find favour with Him—if we are interested in His love—He will communicate to us every blessing we require. What are all the treasures of the world compared with the durable riches and righteousness which He has to bestow? 3. The enjoyment of the Divine presence: "In Thy sight." There is no grace to be found but here. We may find favour with men, but only grace—free favour—with God. We have free access into His presence. We approach His very throne, and He bids us come near. II. THE CHRISTIAN'S DOUBTS: "If now I have found grace in Thy sight." There are seasons when the most eminent saints have been led to doubt of their interest in God. "Happy is the man that feareth alway." Let us refer to some of those things that occasion the believer's doubts. 1. The greatness of the privilege. When we take a review of the vast privileges enjoyed by our finding grace in His sight, and think of our depravity and vileness under a sense of our unworthiness, we exclaim, "Surely such mercy cannot be for me!" 2. The imperfection of our graces. If I have found grace in Thy sight, why do I not more closely follow them who through faith and patience inherit the promises? Why am I not more fervent in prayer? Why not more delighted in God's house? Why do I so little prize the privilege of communion with Him? 3. The withdrawings of God's countenance. There are seasons when the believer is called to walk in darkness, and God hides His face. Without God's presence, the Word is a dead letter, ordinances are a blank, all the means we may use are insipid. 4. The apostasy of false professors. Then the thought occurs in the mind—perhaps after all I am deceiving myself with the profession of godliness, while I have never felt its power, and I mistake the excitement of natural feelings for the operation of a Divine principle—perhaps, after in outward appearance reaching the very gate of heaven, I shall be thrust down to hell. But is there no way of ascertaining the fact? III. THE CHRISTIAN'S DESIRE. Gideon asked a sign. "Show me a sign that Thou talkest with me." And God gave it him. Christians have a sign beyond all visions, tokens, voices, or any outward manifestation. There are three ways in which God shows His people a sign—1. By the workings of His providence. 2. By the communications of His grace. Thus He speaks peace to the soul—calms the spirit—gives us a sense of pardoning mercy. 3. By the witness of His Spirit (Rom. viii. 16). There are many ways in which this sign is given by the Spirit. It is done by sealing home pardon to the soul—by more deeply impressing on our souls the Divine likeness—by pouring out a spirit of prayer—by implanting divine principles—by giving filial dispositions and tempers—inspiring heavenly desires and affections—conferring the graces of the Spirit, and making us bring forth the fruits of the Spirit—causing the Spirit to dwell in us as in a temple, and assuring us of God's favour. Conclusion: 1. Let those who have not found grace seek the possession of it. Seek to be good rather than great—the grace of God more than the favour of man. 2. Let those who have found grace seek the assurance of it. It is attainable—the way is open. And remember, though you may be as safe, you cannot be as happy without it. (*E. Temple.*) **Bring forth my present, and set it before thee.**—*Gideon's sacrifice:*—He did not want to be rash and hasty, and do what he might be very sorry for afterwards. He thought strongly that this was an angel, but he was not sure yet. His

thoughts had been so set upon the thing, that he even thought he might be dreaming. "If now I have found grace in thy sight," he said, "give me a sign that thou talkest with me." Or again, this might be somebody tempting him and leading him into a trap. So he asked the stranger to stay while he got ready a present for him, as Abraham had done for the three angels who came to him. If this is an ordinary man he will give him food in a hospitable fashion as Easterns do, and then send him on his way—if it is God, he will offer Him a sacrifice. That is why he put the broth in a pot, he kept it for the libation or drink offering, if it should really prove that this was the angel of the Lord. So when the angel said, "Lay the flesh and the cakes on the rock, and pour out the broth," it was as much as saying, "Offer me a sacrifice." Gideon was satisfied directly. Here was the test he had been looking for and wanting to know about. So he obeyed: he poured out the broth as a drink-offering, and the angel touched it, and fire came out of the rock and burnt it up. Then he knew that God was on his side. Now you will see from this, I think, wherein the excellence of his character lay. On the one hand he was not rash, ready to throw his life away for nothing; on the other he was not a laggard, throwing away opportunities when he got them. Now I think you will see the power of this text. He put his broth in a pot for two reasons—(1) He did not want to be deceived; but—(2) He wanted to be ready. Rash men do things in a hurry which they are sorry for afterwards, but rashness is better than indifference, carelessness, indolence. Sad indeed it would have been for him if he had turned a cold ear to what the angel had told him, if he had prepared no sacrifice, had gone on threshing his wheat and taken no heed to God's message. He would have lived and died with God's will towards him unfulfilled. You and I have all of us God's work to do; you have yours, I mine. The world does not know what it is, we do not know ourselves, except in part. We know present duties, but life is not mapped out in full before any of us. But happy is that servant who knows Christ's present will, who has taken pains to learn it, and not only so, but who is ready to fulfil it. Duties which conscience tells us are duties, how ready we are to find excuses to avoid them, and to follow our own pleasure. Gideon had his wheat to thresh; let greater men than he go forth and fight the Midianites. If he had said so, would that have been a strange, unusual case? Would it not have been very like what we have done before now? For the will of God—we must surely have learned that by this time—is very often quite contrary to our own inclinations. Duty says one thing, self-indulgence says another. By all means let us have caution and steadiness, but let not caution be an excuse for doing nothing. Gideon putting his broth in a pot is an everlasting example to us to be ready for God's living sacrifice. (*The Weekly Pulpit.*) **There rose up fire . . . and consumed the flesh.**—*The witness of Divine fire and the altar of Divine peace*:—I. THE DIVINELY-ORDERED OFFERING. 1. What, then, are the offerings that are required? Gideon here offered "the flesh, the unleavened cakes, and the broth." These are simply the sustenance of the natural human life. Taken and assimilated by man, they become portions of his earthly frame. Nowadays, God expects us to make a spiritual offering unto Him of all the energies of our life. 2. The man was ordered to make the offering in an especial manner: "Lay them upon this rock." There is nothing trivial in the record of God's manifestations to man. The offerings of man to God, before they can lead him on to peace, must be based upon the At-one-ment between man and God. II. THE DIVINE ACCEPTANCE OF MAN'S OFFERING. 1. That fire which came forth out of the cleft of the rock in Ophrah is still burning in the deep recesses of the Rock of Ages, ready to come forth in response to the obedient devotion of man. On Calvary, in the self-sacrifice of the God-man, we behold the eternal law of Divine love fulfilling itself. The Church has again and again passed through its hours of coldness and darkness. But in God's good time the fire of revival has kindled, and she has spoken to the hearts of men with power. This sign of "fire" is given to the individual soul no less than to the Church. He who gives himself to God, laying the devotion of his whole soul upon Christ, offering daily in His name the prayers, the praises, the alms, the pure feelings, the chastened thoughts, and all the energies of charity, will find assurance that God talketh with him. He will find his mind brightened by the light of heavenly thoughts and eternal hopes, and his heart fired by the impulses of a Divine love. 2. In this passage we may see the purpose and ultimate destiny of religious forms. The forms of the offering which Gideon made were not unimportant. The Divine voice recognised their value, and directed the manner in which they were to be presented. It was not until they had been duly presented that the fire came forth. When forms of worship, beautiful music,

and august ceremonial express faith and reverence for the majesty of Christ they are offerings laid upon the rock, and are means of quickening spiritual life. But in using them let us look beyond the means to the end, until the forms are in our sight lost to view in the realities of spirit. III. THE IMPRESSIONS LEFT BY THE MANIFESTATION UPON THE MAN'S SOUL. 1. This vivid manifestation of the Divine presence to the soul was but for a short time. On earth man cannot bear the brightness of the supernatural visions of truth, save during brief moments. The overpowering splendours of the theophanies have in mercy been transient. 2. The angel departs, but he leaves his footprints on the soul. This spiritual intuition of the Divine presence given to Gideon soon passed away, but its influence on his heart and mind never died. IV. ITS OBJECTIVE RESULTS IN HIS OUTWARD ACTION. The vision soon passed away. But it wrought a mighty change in Gideon's life and career. That change is briefly but fully recorded in the announcement that he now built an altar unto the Lord. The altar implies the sacrifice. In building an altar unto the Lord he pledged himself to sacrifice henceforth unto the Lord. On what principle did he take this momentous step? In the name of what truth did he build this altar? He called it "Jehovah-shalom"; that is, "Jehovah the author of peace." So in our own day, the object of the messenger of God is to constrain men to build this altar of peace. (*Henry T. Edwards, M.A.*) **Peace be unto thee.**—*The assurance of peace vouchsafed to Gideon*:—Already Gideon had received what ought to have been a sufficient assurance of the Divine favour, for his offering had been accepted, and of this he had received the clearest evidence in the issue of fire from the rock. But the sense of acceptance which this sign was well fitted to inspire was overborne by the indefinite sense of fear, which prostrated him in the dust. But mark how tenderly and sympathisingly the Lord, if not now in a bodily form, at least with audible voice, replies to his cry, and reassures the trembling man. And may we not here recognise the voice of that very Saviour—the Angel of the everlasting covenant, the Prince of Peace, who said to the winds and waves of the sea of Galilee, as they threatened to swallow up His disciples, "Peace be still," and who after His resurrection appeared to them again and again saying, "Peace be unto you"? We may indeed! Never does He allow any one who really fears the Lord to remain long in so deplorable a state as that in which Gideon is described to have been. Never does He "break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax." It gives Him no satisfaction to see any of His creatures overcome by slavish terror and alarm from whatsoever cause. And when, in any case, the soul and the affections are found to yield to constitutional weakness of that kind, who so ready as He with encouraging assurances such as that which He addressed to Gideon, "Peace be unto thee; fear not." He would have us to reflect that the grand end for which He came into this world was to banish all terrors from the guilty breast, to restore tranquillity to the most tempest-tossed bosom. "Fear not," says He; "thou shalt not die!" Death temporal, indeed, still holds its stern dominion over all the families of men. But death eternal has been abolished, and "life and immortality have been brought to light." "Thou shalt surely die," was the doom pronounced on all, in consequence of the entrance of sin into our world. But listen to the gospel bells as their sweet, harmonious sounds come softened by distance over the waters of time. What do they say? "Thou shalt not die; surely thou shalt not die." The Angel of the everlasting covenant whispers it amid the silence of the night, adding, "Because I live, ye shalt live also." And in His hands are the keys of life and of death, of death and of hell. (*W. W. Duncan, M.A.*) **Fear not: thou shalt not die.**—*Death impossible*:—There is no such thing as death. Change, transition, promotion—anything, everything, except an end. This is the great law of Christianity; and the word "eternity" is the logical condensation of the mighty truth. Nature changes all the time. Nations alter and seemingly disappear. We ourselves pass on, and up; but nobody, nothing whatever, inevitably disappears. But, oh, how hard it is for us all to learn this comfortable and sublime lesson! 1. The little boy or girl grows up to a man or a woman, and we say complainingly, "We have lost our child!" No! We have not lost our child. The child is there, with a fresh body and a matured soul. And the man or woman grows into old age, and all previous life seems to be wiped out and lost. Oh, no! not wiped out, not lost, but prolonged, ripened, illustrated. We have simply the boy or girl, or man or woman, further advanced, and acting on the stage of life with a new costume; but the same actors, after all, are behind the dress. Then again, these dear ones vanish from our sight, and we say, "They are gone, they are dead, they are no more: it is an irreparable loss." But they are not gone—no more in the flesh, but alive with God;

and they are not lost, but transplanted, glorified, crowned, and it may be right at our side after all, although unseen by mortal eyes. No more lost than was the boy or girl who became a man or woman, than was the man or woman in full vigour of life who became worn out by old age. They have only taken one step more. "Mortals cry, A man is dead: Angels cry, A child is born." One way of looking at it, it was death; but another way of looking at the matter, the Christian way, it was birth. And so, ever and for ever, not destruction, but creation. 2. Nations alter and seemingly disappear; but are they really gone, or with us in a newer, better, and holier shape? I believe that there has been a telephonic, telegraphic, and electric influence, ever since the days of Adam to the present hour, by which all past history is present life, and every nation seemingly dead is living again in Asia, Africa, Europe, and America, so that the races of to-day are but the great-grandchildren of the races of the past, and you and I have something in our bones and blood of Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Judæa, Phœnicia, India, and Persia, so that nations never really die, but are changed, transmitted, reorganised, improved, by marriage, by birth, by intermingling of races, by time, by the grace of God; so that, in a certain philosophical sense, I am not only an American, but a Roman, a Grecian, a Persian, a part of everybody and everything that ever has been, and a part, by transmission, century after century, of everybody and everything that ever will be; and thus there is an everlasting unity of flesh, and the unity of God and the unity of humanity are great and mighty and twin realities. Do not forget the prayer of Jesus—that those who were His might be one with Him, as He was one with God. 3. Once more, nature changes all the time. Yes; but nature never dies. Do those leaves that you tread on an October or November day perish? Are they annihilated? Is their work done, and is our farewell to them a finality? Oh, no! They will go into the hungry earth, and, through many changes, at last will fall into your hands in the shape of a luscious peach, or rosy apple, or juicy pear, or else as a violet or rosebud or japonica will bless your eyes, cheer your heart, and somehow spiritually say, "We do not die, we have never perished: we are blessing the world for ever and ever; and like you, O mortals, we are immortal." 4. What do our great writers and thinkers say about death? Beecher: "Dying is life." Bryant: "Death is a deliverer." Walter Scott: "Is death the last sleep? No, it is the last final awakening." Dr. Adam Clarke: "Death to a good man is but passing through a dark entry, out of one little dusky room of his Father's house into another that is fair and large, light-some and glorious, and divinely entertaining." Goethe: "In the death of a good man eternity is seen looking through time." But hear the Lord Jesus Christ: Matt. ix. 24; John xi. 25, xiv. 2; Matt. xxii. 32; Luke xxiii. 43. (*C. D. Bradlee.*)

Jehovah-shalom.—*Jehovah-shalom: the Lord our peace:*—The theme presented by this text is, the peace which the gospel brings. "It is a great mercy to have the gospel of peace, but it is a far greater mercy to have the peace of the gospel." I. THE NATURE OF THIS PEACE. We call it in our form of benediction "The peace of God." It is so called with great propriety, because it is the peace which God has designed and provided. It was arranged for in the far-back ages of eternity, when the stupendous plan of our redemption in Christ Jesus was determined upon. The peace which Jehovah-Jesus gives is not the peace of exhaustion, nor the peace of satisfied sensualism, nor the peace of mental torpor and inaction, nor the peace of apathy, nor the peace of death—no; but it is the peace which attends pardon, and renewal, and consecration, and activity, and life, in its fullest and most perfect plan. An incident in Grecian history illustrates the nature of this peace. Thrasybulus was one of the chief men of Athens about the year 400 B.C. He came to the head of affairs after many political changes, which had left behind them great bitterness of feeling. To prevent the existence of heartburnings, and to secure peace among the Athenians, Thrasybulus exerted his influence to secure the passage of a law, which they called Amnestia, from the Greek word signifying no recollection, or no memory, and from which our word amnesty comes. This law provided that all former wrongs should be forgotten, and the people pledged themselves henceforward to live lovingly and peaceably towards each other, and as if all the wrongs and offences of the past had never taken place. Among men, with such infirmities as cling to us, it may be very easy to make a law like this, but it must be very hard to carry it out. Yet this is a fair illustration of the peace which the gospel brings to us. It is a peace founded on an act of amnesty. But this act is fairly and fully carried out. II. THE FOUNDATION OF THIS PEACE. This peace rests on the atoning work of Christ.

"He made peace," says the apostle, "through the blood of His Cross" (Col. xi. 20). And in another place the same apostle teaches us to connect the thought of this peace with "the blood of the everlasting covenant" (Heb. xiii. 20). "There are depths in the ocean," we are told, "which no tempest ever stirs; they are beyond the reach of all the storms which sweep and agitate the surface of the sea. And there are heights in the blue sky above to which no cloud ever ascends, where no tempest ever rages, where all is perpetual sunshine, and nothing exists to disturb the deep serene. Each of these is an emblem of that peace which Jesus imparts to His people." "The foundation of God standeth sure," says the apostle. But we must have a clear knowledge of what this foundation is, and that we are certainly built upon it, if we would have the full enjoyment of the Christian's peace. A young minister in Wales, having to spend a night in a very exposed locality, slept at a farm-house, situated on the highest point of land in that part of the country. After he had retired to rest, the wind rose suddenly, and blew a tempest. He thought he felt the house rock, as the tempest beat upon it in its fury, and he feared it would fall. He could not sleep; so he rose and sat by the fire to be ready for the worst. But the morning dawned at last, and the house stood unharmed. When the family assembled the minister told of his fears, and expressed his wonder that they could sleep securely amidst the peltings of such a storm. "Why," said he, "I was afraid every moment the house would fall." "Oh," said the farmer, "I never have a fear of the house falling—for I know that it is founded upon the rock." III. THE INFLUENCE EXERTED BY THIS PEACE. 1. It is an extensive influence. It sweeps through the whole circle of our relationships. It is the peace of God, and peace with God. It is peace with the angels and all holy beings. It is peace with the providence of God, and all the complicated mechanism of its far-reaching agency. If I possess this peace, then, go where I will, I need not fear. A traveller met an aged Christian once, who lived alone in a cottage, on the top of a mountain, far away from any human habitation. "Are you not afraid," said he, "to live in this lonely place?" "What have I to be afraid of," was the reply, "when Providence is my next-door neighbour?" And then the circle of this peace contracts itself to the bosom of every believer. Its centre is here; its circumference widens out to the farthest boundaries of the universe. If I am at peace with God, then I may go forth in the path of duty, anywhere, without a fear, for all the universe is at peace with me. But are there not evil men and evil spirits who are at peace with no one? True, there are. May they not work me ill, through the wrath that is in their hearts? They would, indeed, if they could. But they are never, for one moment, beyond the clear knowledge and efficient control of that Providence "whose everlasting purposes control all agencies and accidents, converting them to good." 2. It is a protecting influence. The apostle Paul brings out this view of the matter very clearly when he says, "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ" (Phil. iv. 7). The word rendered "keep," has a military aspect, and denotes to guard or garrison the soul. A garrison is put into a fortress or citadel for its defence and protection. And this is what the peace of God is designed to do for our souls. God intends that we shall find protection in it. Somewhere in the East there is said to be a tree which is a non-conductor of electricity. The people in that region are aware of the fact, and when the terrible thunderstorms come, which prevail in those parts, they flee for safety to this tree, and always find it there. What a beautiful emblem of that protection vouchsafed to all who seek peace beneath the shadow of the Cross! 3. And then it is a comforting influence which this peace exerts. It is the key-note which must be struck in our bosoms before we can know anything of the joy and comfort of the heavenly world. That quaint old writer, Quarles, imagines the possibility of our gaining the possession of earth, and air, and sea, and sky, yea of all things, apart from the presence or the peace of God, using the two terms as interchangeable, and then winds up his comparison in this impressive way—

> "Without Thy presence earth gives no refection;
> Without Thy presence sea affords no treasure;
> Without Thy presence air's a rank infection;
> Without Thy presence heaven's itself no pleasure;
> If not possessed, if not enjoyed in Thee,
> What's earth, or sea, or air, or heaven to me?"

To have this peace is to have our wills moving in harmony with the Divine will; it is to have our affections subordinated and controlled by the holy law of God; it is to have our desires elevated—our fears of trouble and death subdued—and our hopes of immortality strong, and bright, and abiding. 4. And then it is a peace that is useful in its influence. Jesus called attention to this feature of its influence when He said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." Those who really possess this peace will go on their way cultivating the things that make for peace. The spirit of peace, when properly exercised in the paths of daily life, has a power to turn evil into good, in a thousand ways more mighty than any magician with his fabled wand has ever claimed to exercise. If this peace is ours, let us try to show, in our lives, its elevating and satisfying power. Let all our aims and influences be in the interests of peace. But, if we are not Christians, there is no peace for us. No peace with our own consciences—no peace with God—no peace with the universe. How can we remain another hour in such a state? It is possible to make peace now: to-morrow it may be too late for ever. (*R. Newton, D.D.*) *One war over and another begun:*—I. GIDEON'S SIGH FOR PEACE; for he loved not war, but pined for quiet. He called the name of the altar "Jehovah-shalom," which the margin reads, "The Lord send peace." You see, therefore, that deeper down in his spirit than any desire for warlike honour there was a yearning after peace. He wanted not the spoils of princes; he only desired to plough, and sow, and reap in peace. 1. And do you wonder at it, when the ills of war were all around? The Bedouin styled the valley of Jezreel "the meadows of God"; how grievous to see those fat pastures trodden down by the feet of the invaders! Ah, little can you and I imagine of the horrors of war. If we saw battle with our own eyes we should with burning fervour cry, "Send us peace in our days, good Lord." 2. Moreover, he had not only seen war, but he sighed for peace because he was himself feeling the mischief of it. The dread of the conflict had come to his own mountain farm at Abi-ezer. Let us bow our heads and thank God that He has long blessed this favoured isle with unbroken peace; and as an act of thankfulness to God let us set our faces against the war-spirit which so readily inflames our fellow-countrymen. 3. The way of peace was sufficiently well known to Gideon; the prophet of the Lord had indicated to the people that the only way of peace was for Israel to return unto Jehovah, her God. Much is gained when we know this, if our knowledge leads to practical action. 4. While Gideon was meditating and working, an angel appears to him and gives him the assurance that with him at least God was at peace. We know how sweet is the assurance that being justified by faith we have peace with God. It is well with us when we are assured that the Lord is with us, our helper, our shield, our portion for ever and ever. 5. But there arose in his mind a grave anxiety. His was a very careful, thoughtful soul, for he was a man of prudence, large-hearted, far-seeing, and given to look at things coolly and steadily; and there arose in his heart a question serious and vital, "Is this the voice of God to me, or am I deluded? Is God at peace with me, or am I like the rest, plunged in a horrible warfare against the living God?" Therefore he puts a question, and he asks a sign that he might make sure of what he was about. In spiritual matters you and I had need be sure. If we have peace within our spirit let us make certain that it is the peace of God; for still are there voices that cry, "Peace, peace," where there is no peace. Still do siren songs charm men to ruin with their dulcet notes; still does the fatal river flow most smoothly as it approaches the dreadful cataract. II. From Gideon's longing desire to obtain peace with God and then peace for his country we turn to look a little further into GIDEON'S FEAR WHICH HE MET WITH IN THE WAY OF PEACE. "An angel" appeared to him—so saith the text in the Authorised Version; but in truth it was the angel of Jehovah, and this should have comforted him, even as it has comforted us. Why was Gideon afraid? 1. Not because he was a coward—you will scarcely meet with a braver man in all Scripture than this son of Joash—but because even brave men are alarmed at the supernatural. He saw something which he had never seen before—an appearance celestial, mysterious, above what is usually seen of mortal men; therefore, as he feared God, Gideon was afraid. When the living God draws very near to a soul, even though it be in the person of Christ Jesus, that soul is struck with awe, and trembles before the Lord. It cannot well be otherwise. 2. Gideon had been ill-taught by tradition. There was a rumour abroad, which was derived from truth and yet was false, namely, that no man could see a heavenly being and live. The tradition was an accretion to the truth and a corruption of it. We may not

see the face of God, but we may see Jesus; in fact, we live because we see Him. Beware of the moss which grows upon a truth. 3. Gideon was in a state of mind in which he could be easily cast down. He was a brave man, but long affliction had cast a tinge of sadness over him. And you, dear heart, if you are seeking after peace with God, I should not wonder if fear follows fear, and yet no fear drives you from looking unto the Lord. It is but natural that you should be overawed, but oh, be not despairing, for there is the surest reason for hope. Still look to Jesus, and He will surely in His due time send you a blessed deliverance. 4. Gideon's greatest fear arose out of a sign which he had himself asked for. He said, "Show me a sign," and when he had that sign, namely, God's coming to him, then it was that he was afraid. Be very chary how you ask for signs, for they may work your discouragement rather than your comfort. We cry aloud, "Show me a token for good," and when the token is given we are amazed at being heard, and fall to fearing more sadly than before. Therefore pray for such boons with bated breath, and say twice over concerning such things, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." 5. Gideon had one truth before him which ought to have prevented all his fears, for the Lord had spoken to him and said, "Go in this thy might." How could he die if he was to deliver Israel?—he must be a live man to do that; and yet, you see, he forgets to reason for his own comfort, but takes care to argue for his fears. Have I never seen you doing this? I have often caught myself at it—refusing to use my logic for the strengthening of my faith, but perverting reason in order to assist my unbelief. Is not this foolish and wicked? III. GOD'S COMFORT OF HIS SERVANT. 1. "The Lord said unto him, Shalom—peace be unto thee; fear not, thou shalt not die." The Lord would not have His Gideons disturbed in mind. If we are to trouble the enemy we must not be troubled ourselves. He wants His workers to be full of comfort while they labour. 1. Notice the great power of God in speaking home the truth. Suppose I salute you with "Brethren, peace be to you." That would be a sweet word; but when the Lord says it you feel the peace itself. 2. The Lord also cheered him with "Fear not." Oh, that charming word; as full as it is short—"Fear not." It is the death-knell of fear, the life of hope. If we once hear it as God's fiat in our soul it makes us leap over a wall or break through a troop. Doubts and fears flee away like spectres of the night when the sun arises. Gideon feared himself, feared his own unfitness and unworthiness, feared in the awful presence of God; but the Lord said, "Fear not," and Gideon's heart grew calm. 3. Then the Lord added, "Thou shalt not die," thus meeting the special form of his dread. This is what the Lord says to every poor trembler who is holding to Him by the desperate grip of faith, "Thou shalt not die. Thou shalt not die the second death: thou hast no sin to die for, for I have laid thy transgressions on My only begotten Son; thou shalt not die, for Jesus died. Thy spiritual life cannot expire, for thy 'life is hid with Christ in God,' and because Jesus lives thou shalt live also." IV. GIDEON'S MEMORIAL. His fears being banished, and being at perfect peace, Gideon now goes to work. Are any of you questioning whether you are saved or not? Do not go out preaching yet, for you may, perhaps, put others into bondage. Are any of you half afraid that you are not at peace with God? Be careful what you do! Strive after peace, lest you weaken your testimony. God would have His people be at peace with Him, and know that they are so, for if they are fretted within and worried in reference to their God, how can they fight the battles of life? When Gideon is fully at peace what does he begin to do for God? If God loves you He will use you either for suffering or service; and if He has given you peace you must now prepare for war. Will you think me odd if I say that our Lord came to give us peace that He might send us out to war? Gideon's first work was to go and cut down his father's sacred grove, which stood on the top of the hill, and enclosed an altar to Baal. A splendid clearance was made that night. "Now," cries he, "over with that detestable altar to Baal." Some people would have said, "Spare it as a fine piece of antiquity." Yes, and leave it to be used again! I say, down with it, for the older it is the more sin it has caused, and the more likely is it that it will be venerated again. Gideon cast down every stone, and it was bravely done. But see, by the Lord's bidding he piles a new altar of earth, or unhewn stone; and when that is done he fetches his father's bullock and slays it for a sacrifice. How steadily they went about this re-establishment of the pure faith! If God has given you peace, go home and begin your reform. I would preach up the overthrow of every sin. Down with every idol. Have you one left? Over with it and present a sacrifice to God.

Every true Christian should pass a reform bill at home and carry it out. But to pull down is not enough. Plenty of people can do that. Gideon, as we have seen, builds an altar to Jehovah. When you are at perfect peace with God, think what you can do for Him; think of a new plan of work, or consider how to do the old work better; advance any part of Divine truth that has been forgotten, any ordinance that has been neglected, any virtue that has been despised. Especially make prominent Christ Jesus, the Altar and Sacrifice so dear to God. When he had built his altar he called it "Jehovah-shalom," which was done by way of thanksgiving for peace received. It was a psalm in two words; it was a song of one verse infinitely sweet. "Jehovah-shalom": the Lord our peace. Moreover, it was a prayer, as the margin puts it, "Jehovah, send peace." If you have peace with God, let your next prayer be, "Lord, give peace to all Thy people." "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Gideon's altar*:—I. The first thing is THE GREAT DISCOVERY which this man has made, and in the rapture of which he named his altar—THAT THE SIGHT OF GOD IS NOT DEATH, BUT LIFE AND PEACE. Can you write upon the memorial of your experiences—"The Lord is my peace"? Have you passed from hearsay into personal contact? Can you say, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee"? Do you know the further experience expressed in the subsequent words of the same quotation—"Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes"? And have you passed out of that stormy ocean of terror and self-condemnation into the quiet haven of trust in Him in whom we have peace with God, where your little boat lies quiet, moored for ever to the Rock of Ages, to Jehovah, who is Peace? II. We may look upon this inscription as suggesting the thought THAT GOD'S PEACE IS THE BEST PREPARATION FOR, AND MAY BE EXPERIENCED IN THE MIDST OF, THE INTENSEST CONFLICT. In the inmost keep of the castle, though the storm of war may be breaking against the walls, there will be a quiet chamber where no noise of the archers can penetrate, and the shouts of the fight are never heard. Let us seek to live in the secret place of the Most High; and in still communion with Him keep our inmost souls in quiet, while we bravely front difficulties and enemies. You are to be God's warriors; see to it that on every battlefield there stands the altar "Jehovah-shalom." III. We may say that that altar, with its significant inscription, EXPRESSED THE AIM OF THE CONFLICT AND THE HOPE WHICH SUSTAINS IN THE FIGHT. The true tranquillity of the blessed life is the prize of conflict. David, "the man of war from his youth," prepares the throne for Solomon, in whose reign no alarms of war are heard. If you would enter into peace you must fight your way to it, and every step of the road must be a battle. The land of peace is won by the good fight of faith. But Gideon's altar not only expressed his purpose in his taking up arms, but his confidence of accomplishing it, based upon the assurance that the Lord would give peace. It was a trophy erected before the fight, and built, not by arrogant presumption or frivolous under-estimate of the enemy's strength, but by humble reliance on the power of that Lord who had promised His presence and assured triumph. So the hope that named this altar was the hope that war meant victory, and that victory would bring peace. That hope should animate every Christian soldier. Across the dust of the conflict the fair vision of unbroken and eternal peace should gleam before each of us, and we should renew fainting strength and revive drooping courage by many a wistful gaze. We may realise that hope in large measure here. But its fulfilment is reserved for the land of peace which we enter by the last conflict with the last enemy. Every Christian man's gravestone is an altar on which is written "Our God is peace," in token that the warrior has passed into the land where violence shall no more be heard, wasting nor destruction within its borders, but all shall be deep repose, and the unarmed, because unattacked, peace of tranquil communion with, and likeness to, Jehovah our peace. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Jehovah-shalom*:—I. GIDEON'S FEAR. Gideon's fear was traditional. It was a commonly received opinion that no man could receive a direct manifestation from heaven and live. Ever since the fall of Adam in paradise man has ever shunned and dreaded the immediate presence of Jehovah. If the righteous thus fear and thus tremble when the Lord revealeth Himself unto them in love and peace, "where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear," when He cometh forth from His place and sweareth that He will by no means clear the guilty? II. GIDEON'S FEAR REMOVED. There was more than a mere salutation in those words, "Peace be unto thee." Gideon would never have found heart to have built up his memorial altar and called it "Jehovah-shalom" if peace itself had not entered his heart when those

words entered his ears. And what is that which now quells the fears of the trembling sinner? What is that which assures him of peace, takes away his alarms, and imparts to his soul holy confidence that he shall not die? This altar, Jehovah-shalom, is an altar which many a grateful, loving heart has built up high above all the storms and tempests of life, and all the dread fears of death. And what has done all this? Whence the joy of saints? Whence the peace which passeth all understanding? What is that which opens the heart to peace and assures the soul of endless life? There is but one grand means—there is but one grand channel. It is not far off. You need take no long and perilous journey to obtain it. "Say not in thine heart, Who shall bring Christ down?" &c. But if men turn a deaf ear to this word of the gospel; if they stand trembling or hardened in the presence of God, alike unfit to live or to die—if they listen to the voice of gain or pleasure; if they turn a more ready ear to the sounds of sin or temptation than they do to the words of the Most High—is it any wonder that they are strangers to peace? What have they to do with peace as long as they reject or neglect the word of the Prince of Peace? III. THE ALTAR WHICH GIDEON BUILT. 1. What a memorial of Gideon's faith was it! As soon as the Lord had spoken words of promise Gideon raised his altar, not only in remembrance of the promise, but as an evidence that he trusted in it. The greatest act of man towards God is faith—a reception of His Word, and a reliance upon it. All things are possible to him that believeth. 2. This altar was, moreover, a memorial of Gideon's hope. "Hope maketh not ashamed!" How sweet, how precious, is the Christian's hope. It is no vain wish or mere fervent desire of the mind. It is a grace of the Holy Spirit, which He alone enkindles in the heart. It is the crowning grace of all. Ah! this would be a dreary world without hope! When earthly hope vanishes and despair enters the heart, no mere human, no extraneous help, will raise a man above himself. And what is the soul without hope—this faith-imparted, faith-nourished hope? And if true believers—real Christians—God's own children—need more of this "hope which maketh not ashamed"—if their faith at times fail to bring joy and peace in believing—what are we to say, what are we to think of some who are living "without God and without hope in the world"? I say to them, in all heartfelt sincerity, "Blind credulity you have much, but true faith you have none." 3. Gideon's altar was, lastly, a memorial of his gratitude. He could never look upon that altar without recalling to his mind the wonders of the past. Thus many a memorial of gratitude has been raised by pious and loving hearts. "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits towards me?" was David's grateful inquiry. Gratitude welled up in Jacob's full heart at Bethel when he "vowed a vow, saying, If God be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, so that I come again in peace, then shall the Lord be my God, and this stone which I have set for a pillar shall be God's house; and of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee." "Ye are not your own," saith the apostle Paul, "for ye are bought with a price." Ah! let this purchase be valued—let this price be estimated—let imagination attempt to conceive its infinite magnitude and endless consequences, and then ask, what memorial can be commensurate with that deep sense of fervent love and gratitude which should overflow the heart. (*G. A. Rogers, M.A.*) *Jehovah-shalom:*—I. WE HAVE A FAR-SIGHTED MAN LOOKING TO THE RESULT RATHER THAN TO THE MEANS. Gideon called his altar "Jehovah-shalom"—the Lord send "peace." As he was going to war we would have supposed him to inscribe, "The Lord send victory, the Lord send success." But the Holy Spirit prompted him to write "peace." There is wonderful power in this. What are all our battles, all our struggles, but a means to an end? That end is peace. How much wiser and how much better would it be if we were to look at the issue! II. WE HAVE A BRAVE MAN RENOUNCING HIS OWN PROWESS. "The Lord send peace." The very message of the angel was calculated to make Gideon self-opinionated. He was favoured with a vision of God. He was appointed to be the Divine vicegerent. But instead of doing what we should expect, he renounced all pretensions to any superiority, and was only overwhelmed by a consciousness of the honour reposed in him. True greatness and true humility always go together. The great man is humble and the humble man is great. It is a mark of superior minds to realise how small they are. III. WE HAVE A PIOUS MAN ENGAGING IN WAR. War is a terrible scourge; one of the most fearful developments of the passions of men. But it has been permitted by God, and even ordered under His arrangements. What the Almighty directs man need not fear to undertake. God works

His purposes by the scourges of earth, and He employs man's passions as His instruments of purification. The few who are sacrificed in war are only as a grain of sand in comparison to those who are sacrificed in sin. IV. WE HAVE A LESSON AS TO OUR OWN CONDUCT; that is, ever to invoke the blessing of God on that which we undertake. When we go forth to duty, or pleasure, or any engagement whatsoever, we should rear our altar to the Lord, and pray that He will send peace and prosperity. And the necessity for this is not taken away because we are doing the Lord's work, at the Lord's bidding, and under the Lord's direction. To teachers, preachers, and evangelists this truth is a very serious one. (*J. J. S. Bird.*)

Vers. 25–32. **Throw down the altar of Baal.**—*Baal's altar destroyed:*—1. Observe God's command to Gideon. He had been hitherto protesting against the idolatry of his family and country by a life of opposition, inasmuch as it was a life of humble, pious fear, and love of Jehovah, and of the worship of Him as the true God. But now he is commanded to perform an act of opposition. Gideon is to destroy Baal's altar before he builds God's; the same altar will not do; God will have no polluted sacrifice; if there is any connection at all between the two, it shall be only this, that the wood of Baal's grove shall be made fuel to burn the sacrifice on Jehovah's altar. Now may not this act of Gideon's, under the Old Testament dispensation, be made to speak the language of the New? "No man can serve two masters; ye cannot serve God and Mammon," any more than God and Baal. But it is a noble act, worthy of the imitator of Gideon, to make the things which were before "an occasion of falling" the instruments of doing good, by putting them to a sanctified use; making them subservient to the furtherance of the gospel, instead of fostering "the lust of the eye and the pride of life," as they did before. Whatever has been the accompaniment of your idol-worship, cut it down, and apply it to a holy purpose; make it fuel for the altar of God. But where shall Gideon build the altar of God? Is it to stand in the place of Baal's? No; as if this were a contamination, the thing is forbidden: "Build an altar unto the Lord upon the top of this rock." The reason was obvious. That rock was the place where the angel of the covenant had met him. That rock was the place on which the miracle had been wrought, to show the Godhead of Him that wrought it and to confirm the faith of him who witnessed it. That rock was the place from whence ascended the sacrifice which the angel had made acceptable by ascending with it. That rock had already witnessed the manifestations of God to Gideon; and there was written, as it were, upon it, "Jehovah-shalom." 2. Observe Gideon's prompt obedience to God's command. He seems to have begun the destruction of idolatry that very night in which God had given the command. Oh, the sad effects of procrastination in matters which respect the overthrow of the idols of the heart and the dedication of the heart to God! How is it that when the command of God is proclaimed to do this there is such hesitation and delay? It is not so much from a determination not to obey it at all as from a fallacious hope of being better able to comply with it at some other time, which time is constantly keeping its distance in proportion as life itself advances. 3. We notice the influence of Gideon's character and conduct over those who were in his service: "Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as the Lord said unto him." It seems that Gideon had not only kept himself from the defilement of his country's idolatry, but that he had used his influence and authority in endeavouring to preserve his servants from it also; and now, when he has to perform a work beyond his own strength—a work in which not one man in his father's house, nor in all Israel, can be found to help him—the hearts of his own ten servants are made willing to unite with him, and they give him a proof on which he can depend that his counsel and example have had a proper effect by assisting him at the risk of their lives. Here, then, is a point of Gideon's character which deserves the imitation of every master of a family. Gideon keeps his own servants from bowing the knee to Baal. He instructs them in the knowledge of the true God. His authority is exercised for the best of purposes. 4. Observe how professing Christians may often be put to confusion and shame by a comparison with those very idolaters whose ignorance appears so pitiable in their sight. Here is a god made of a log of wood or a block of stone; it is a lifeless and senseless image: and yet his worshippers "rise up early in the morning" to worship him. See how diligent they are in his service, how zealous for his honour, how fervent in their devotions! Compare that god with our God, and then compare those worshippers with ourselves. 5. Observe how the enmity of the carnal heart shows itself when any effort is made for promoting the worship

and glory of God. "The men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die: because he hath cast down the altar of Baal." As long as religion remains a dead letter, a mere matter of profession devoid of practice, the world will not cry out against it. But when the decisive part which the Christian takes shows the difference which exists between him and others as to motive and principle; when his life is seen to be a constant reproach to theirs, and his love for God a contrast to their love for mammon; when Baal's altar is cast down, and God's altar built; then the carnal mind becomes a spirit of persecution; then a man's foes become those of his own household; and because he is not content to think or speak about religion merely, but is active enough to do something for the cause, he is made to suffer for it. Hence the calumny which a zealous Christian undergoes; hence all the misconstruction put upon his good works; hence all the evil motives charged upon him, and all the hard speeches which are spoken against him. Lastly, observe that God can "make the wrath of man to praise Him, and the remainder of wrath He can restrain." It might have been supposed that Joash, whose bullock had been slain and whose altar had been thrown down, would have been more enraged than the rest. But, lo! he takes the part of the accused. It seems as if he had been secretly influenced by his son's pious example; and perhaps he was struggling with the convictions of his own mind upon the folly and wickedness of his idolatry when the conduct of these men brought him at once to the point. Gideon commits his cause to God; and God not only takes care of the cause, but of Gideon. And so it is, and always shall be, with the Christian who is called forth to fight the battles of the Lord. He shall be able, in the strength of his Master, to put to flight all who oppose his progress. (*F. Elwin.*) *The way to deal with public abuses*:—May not we all learn from what is here recorded not to shrink from boldly and promptly assailing and seeking to uproot all moral evils, which have already become chronic, or threaten ere long to become so. Half-measures, in regard to such matters as those to which we refer, never succeed. The more thoroughly the iron will of a Cromwell combines with the sterling spirituality of a John the better fitted is the reformer for his difficult and delicate task. It will never do for one in his circumstances to act in a spirit of compromise, where truth and principle demand the prompt, vigorous, and unsparing application of the sledge-hammer and the axe. But if firmness and decision are indispensable in dealing with public abuses, whether in Church or State, they are no less indispensable in dealing with the corruption of our own hearts and any evil habits which we may have contracted. It is peculiarly necessary that we set ourselves resolutely and vigorously to the work of self-reformation—a work which, while it must always take the precedence of every other kind of rectification, can never succeed if attempted in our own strength. Cheered and sustained by the Divine promise, so freely and largely given to those who are sincere in their desire to reform their own hearts and lives, let every one apply the pruning-knife with nerve and determination to the overgrowth of what is false in principle or vicious in practice, and lop it off without remorse (Mark ix. 43–48). Another lesson to be derived from Gideon's conduct on this occasion is the duty of obeying the commands of God with unquestioning promptitude. Too rash and impetuous we may be, but we can never be too prompt. Instructive as the example of Gideon is, still more so is that of his Master and our Exemplar who, when the bitter cup of retribution due to us was put into His hand and He was satisfied that it was indeed the will of His Father that He should drink it, drank it to the very dregs. (*W. W. Duncan, M.A.*) *The valorous assault*:—I. Observe GOD'S COMMAND TO GIDEON. 1. Gideon is commanded to destroy the altar of Baal. "God or Baal"—not "God and Baal"—was the point to be settled before any deliverance could be expected. Now, throw New Testament light upon this, and what do we learn? The lesson is trumpet-tongued. No compromise—no halting between two opinions—is the language of the command. God hates a divided heart. He will not endure two altars. He will give no deliverance as long as Baal's altar stands. No sacrifice, however costly, is, or can be, accepted, which is offered upon the polluted altar of man's corrupt heart. A new altar must be built up—an altar of God's workmanship—of God, and for God, that is the only altar which will sanctify an acceptable gift. Any attempt to worship at Jehovah's altar on one day in seven, and to worship at the altar of Baal or Mammon on the other six days of the week, is not only vain, but suicidal. God will have a new heart, and a whole heart, or none. 2. The next thing Gideon was commanded to do was to cut down Baal's grove and make it fuel for the altar of God. Groves were not idolatrous—there was no harm in them—

but they were occasions of sin. How many had been ruined, and ruined for ever, under the foliage of those groves! Perversion of nature's growth to the dishonour of nature's God! Many would plead for the harmless trees who would condemn both Baal and his idolatrous worship. But God knows the heart of the sinner better than he knows it himself; and therefore He says, "Cut down the grove." Cut down the occasion of sin. Touch not, taste not, handle not that which causes men to perish with the using. Avoid the spot, shun the places, where Satan's seat is. Do more than this! God commanded Gideon to "offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove." This was turning the idolatrous grove to a good purpose. Let there be no waste—no useless destruction. Money, health, time, influence, example, all, once expended for Baal, now let them all be as fuel for the altar of God. 3. The third thing God commanded Gideon to do was to build an altar unto the Lord his God. But where was this altar to be reared? Was it to stand on the spot whereon Baal's altar stood? No! the place is polluted. On no unhallowed spot must this altar be raised. Build it, said the Lord, "upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place." Gideon must build it upon the rock already consecrated by the wondrous doings thereon of the angel of the covenant. May we not say of this rock what Paul said of the smitten rock in the wilderness, "That rock was Christ." He is indeed both altar and rock—yea, He is Himself the sacrifice. Standing on Him alone as our Rock, we ever hear the words, "Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die." He only is the true Rock—higher than we—far above the flood which sweeps the impenitent into the depths of woe. He, too, only is the Rock on which we can with safety place the altar of our hearts. The old foundation will not do—it is polluted—it is defiling. No altar, no sacrifice will God accept if it be offered upon the site of Baal's altar. "Behold, I make all things new"—this is our hope to come. This must be the rule of our faith and practice now. II. And now we come to GIDEON'S OBEDIENCE. 1. His obedience was prompt. He did not give himself time to take counsel of his fears. He did it by night, lest he should be opposed and hindered. He had no fear on account of detection. He must have known that his deed would be proclaimed over the whole nation. His aim was to do the work out of hand, and leave the consequences with God. Duty was his, events were God's. Noble example. Half the shipwrecks of faith would be escaped were it followed. Procrastination is the bane of true godliness. 2. We observe, however, that Gideon's obedience was attended with personal danger. He needed courage and strong faith. Doubtless he sought for grace equal to that night of danger whence alone all strength cometh. The followers of Baal—the men of the city—were zealous for the worship of Baal. If idolaters be zealous for the honour of Baal, he will be no less zealous for the honour and glory of God. Now, it is just this zeal and this courage, in the face of danger and difficulties, which prove the character of the true Christian. If a man will venture nothing for Christ he is not worthy of Him. Ah, we need a Gideon to rise up in Israel! Rather we need that all the people of God should be as zealous for the true God, for His Word, for His day, for His worship, as idolaters are for the worship of Baal. 3. Mark, also, that Gideon's obedience was eminently successful and strikingly rewarded. He was for God, and God was for him. The Lord made his way prosperous. Gideon's ten servants did their work well. He was not left to do all the work himself. Doubtless they caught their master's spirit and zeal. It is astonishing how much influence for good or evil every master exercises over his own household. Eyes are upon him when he leasts suspects it. But Gideon was defended by one who of all others seemed pledged to oppose him. His father ceased to be an idolater that very night. Perhaps the bravery of his son, or his steady and consistent piety and zeal, convinced him of his sin, or perhaps the impotency of Baal to save himself was conclusive logic to his mind. Who can tell how many fathers and mothers in Israel, how many sons and daughters, relatives and friends, would be converted and saved, were Christian men and women as faithful to their God as was Gideon? You think to conciliate the world by concession, by connivance at their sinful principles and customs. Alas! your inconsistency only leads them to despise you. Be consistent, be uncompromising in serving the Lord; be courageous—obey God rather than man, and God will honour you, as he Has honoured many, and made them instruments in winning father and mother, brothers and sisters, to Christ. (*G. A. Rogers, M.A.*) *On the destruction of idols:*—The idolatrous altar and false worship of one's own clan, of one's own family—these need courage to overturn, and more than courage—a ripeness of time and a Divine call. A man must be sure of himself and his motives,

for one thing, before he takes upon him to be the corrector of errors that have secured truth to his fathers and are maintained by his friends. Suppose people are actually worshipping a false god—a world-power which has long held rule among them. If one would act the part of iconoclast the question is, by what right? Is he himself clear of illusion and idolatry? Has he a better system to put in place of the old? He may be acting in mere bravado and self-display, flourishing opinions which have less sincerity than those which he assails. There were men in Israel who had no commission and could have claimed no right to throw down Baal's altar, and taking upon them such a deed would have had short shrift at the hands of the people of Ophrah. And so there are plenty among us who, if they set up to be judges of their fellow-men and of beliefs which they call false, even when these are false, deserve simply to be put down with a strong hand. There are voices, professing to be those of zealous reformers, whose every word and tone are insults. The men need to go and learn the first lessons of truth, modesty, and earnestness. And this principle applies all round—to many who assail modern errors as well as to many who assail established beliefs. On the one hand are men anxious to uphold the true faith. It is well. But anxiety and the best of motives do not qualify them to attack science, to denounce all rationalism as godless. We want defenders of the faith who have a Divine calling to the task in the way of long study and a heavenly fairness of mind, so that they shall not offend and hurt religion more by their ignorant vehemence than they help it by their zeal. On the other hand, by what authority do they speak who sneer at the ignorance of faith and would fain demolish the altars of the world? It is no slight equipment that is needed. Fluent sarcasm, confident worldliness, even a large acquaintance with the dogmas of science, will not suffice. A man needs to prove himself a wise and humane thinker; he needs to know by experience and deep sympathy those perpetual wants of our race which Christ knew and met to the uttermost. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*) *Reform at home*:—In Jerusalem every man sweeps before his own door—at least it is said that he does. If he doesn't, I doubt if any one else does it for him. Here in London the same thing was required of us until a very recent date. If a fall of snow came, say before January, 1892, every man was required by law to sweep in front of his own door, and in the sweeping he was to go as far as the outer edge of the footpath; so that what we know as a proverb in relation to Jerusalem we have practised as a fact in relation to London. But I suppose that most of you will at once understand that the Jerusalem door-front sweeping is only another way of saying that all reform should begin at home; and used in that sense the saying is expressive and suggestive. It is in this sense that I use the text. I. Reform at home should be preached to nations. These are days of rapid travel and national interchange. We visit all the world, and all the world visits us. This enables us to see the excellences and the defects of our neighbours; and I do not think that Englishmen have been slow to speak of the faults of others. But it may be well for us as a people to look a little more at home. If the angel of God came to us as he came to Gideon, I have a suspicion that he would say, "Break down the altar, turn out the idols, heal your own diseases, sweep before your own door, and reform your own abuses and inconsistencies." We send our missionaries to convert the heathen from their darkness and superstitions, and it is good that we should. We send our missionaries to convert the heathen, but what else do we send them? We send them our ardent spirits, our rum fiend, which undoes the good work the men of God succeed in doing. I feel like saying, "Before you send any more missionaries, sweep your own door-step, clean your own house." We have sent our ships into many waters, and our soldiers into many lands, to put down slavery; we have spent much in blood and treasure in this direction; but if the angel came to us as he did to Gideon, wouldn't he rebuke us for the slavery in our midst? If a tenth part of what we hear about the sweater be true, of poor women making clothes for the army, and I know not what beside, at a price on which they cannot live, isn't it time we swept in front of our own door? II. Reform at home should be preached to Churches. We want revivals among the people which shall save them. Then the Church must be revived. We desire to lead the masses to Christ, that they may feel the warm glow of His love, and know the joy of His service. Then the Church must get nearer Christ. We must put out of the Church everything contrary to the spirit of Him whose name it bears. The Churches must be warm, generous, and large-hearted, and this should apply both to pulpit and pew. The pulpit is not always as broad and sympathetic as might be. And there is a good deal of room for

reform in the pew. Cold men in the pews create cold men in the pulpit. Let there be warmth and love in the pews, and the pulpit will warm up. But if icebergs be in the pews you will get marble in the pulpit, and seeking souls will be warned off by the chills which will be as cutting as the east wind. III. REFORM AT HOME SHOULD BE PREACHED TO INDIVIDUALS. All reform should begin at self. We can only mend the universe as we mend its units. We want the nation better, then we must mend its men. We desire to see the Church of God pure and holy, then its members must be holy. Let us break down every altar, and eject every idol, and let the Lord of life, who has a right to rule ours, enter into possession of us. (*C. Leach, D.D.*) *Gideon's reformation not destructive only* :—Gideon does not leave Ophrah without an altar and a sacrifice. Destroy one system without laying the foundation of another that shall more than equal it in essential truth and practical power, and what sort of deliverance have you effected? Men will rightly execrate you. It is no reformation that leaves the heart colder, the life barer and darker than before, and those who move in the night against superstition must be able to speak in the day of a living God who will vindicate His servants. It has been said over and over again, and must yet be repeated, to overturn merely is no service. They that break down need some vision at least of a building up, and it is the new edifice that is the chief thing. The world of thought to-day is infested with critics and destroyers, and may well be tired of them. It is too much in need of constructors to have any thanks to spare for Voltaires and Humes. Let us admit that demolition is the necessity of some hours. We look back on the ruins of Bastilles and temples that served the uses of tyranny, and even in the domain of faith there have been fortresses to throw down, and ramparts that made evil separations among men. But destruction is not progress; and if the end of modern thought is to be agnosticism, the denial of all faith and all ideals, then we are simply on the way to something not a whit better than primeval ignorance. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*) *Daring to oppose wrong* :—I have seen many a time on the sea-shore bits of driftwood tossed hither and thither, the helpless sport of the waves. I have seen on the same shore the black rock standing there unmoved, unshaken—opposing itself to all the might and force of the waves which fumed and seethed around it and dashed themselves in wild and savage fury against it. To be real men we must be not like the driftwood—driven about by every passing wave of opinion; we must be like the rock—able to resist and oppose the full force of the world's fashion and custom. This will not be easy. The world has never loved singularity. Loyalty to conviction, courage to say "No" to the demands made by fashion and custom, will entail upon you scorn, hardship, hate. The way of life is still the narrow path. But I have yet to learn that difficulties can daunt the young and ardent soul. Garibaldi could only promise his ragged soldiers suffering, wounds, and perhaps death if they followed him into Italy, and yet they responded to his call, and said, "General, we are the men." And I am not afraid now that those who have any love or enthusiasm for truth and right will be daunted or terrified because of the suffering wherewith the path of duty abounds. (*J. D. Jones.*) If he be a god, let him plead for himself.—*Religion judged by results* :—When we hear a speech like that, we are inclined to shout, "Hear, hear." Surely it seems reasonable. Surely no one could object to that. Let religion be judged by its results. Do not attempt to argue to defend it; it surely does not need that. Christianity has had eighteen hundred years of trial now, and it is too late to attempt to defend it by mere words. Look at what it has done. If you know your Bibles, you will recollect that both Old and New Testaments claim this test. When Elijah stood alone for God at Carmel, in the presence of the king and the court and the false prophets, he challenged them all to a judgment by results. "The God that answereth by fire, let him be the God." And when the people refused to believe in our Saviour, rejected His teaching, and would not acknowledge Him as their Saviour, He appealed to them on the ground of results: "Though ye believe not Me, believe the works," said Christ (John x. 38); "Believe Me for the very works' sake," said He again (John xiv. 11). If, then, we say, "Judge our religion by its works, the tree by its fruits," you ask, "Well, what has it done?" And when this question is put, whole continents stand up to bear witness to the power and saving might of Jesus Christ. Whole peoples, who have come out of paganism and heathen darkness, say, "Look at us. We are what we are by Christ Jesus the Lord." What has Christianity done? It has filled dark places of the earth with light. It has sent help to the poor, hope to the despairing, comfort to the sad, salvation to the sinful, and restored fallen man to his reconciled God. But let us suppose for a moment that we listen to those who would take Christ and His

religion out of the world. We ask them, "What will you put in place of these? What have you to offer us? Before I give up the old I want to see the new. Bring out your god, let us have a look at him. It will be interesting to see what he is like. We should like to know what he has done. We want to apply our test of results to him. We challenge you on this ground." A meeting was once held at which a number of very clever people set themselves the task of opposing Christianity and slighting God. When the speaking was over, criticism and questions were asked for. After a short pause an old woman rose up on the floor of the meeting-place and said, "These men have been opposing religion and almost laughing at God. I want to ask what they can give me instead of what I have? I was left a widow with six children, not one of whom could work. I rested upon the promise of God, who says He is a husband to the widow and a father to the fatherless, and I have found His word to be true. For, though I have had a hard struggle, not one of my six children or myself ever wanted a bit of bread. I have brought them all up, and now I am just waiting till God thinks fit to take me home to rest. Will these men up there tell me what could have done better for me than my loving God has done?" It was an old woman's argument, but as it was one of experience it was powerful. I put her question, "What has infidelity done?" Until we can see something of its results we shall not be disposed to part with the religion which has lifted us into the higher regions of life and hope. We know too much of the blessings which result from Christianity ever to be persuaded to give it up. We have seen it reconstruct, remake men. It is said that now science has invented a way of dealing with the waste slag which comes from the iron furnaces which used to be thrown away in heaps as worthless. I have seen somewhere various useful articles, vases and others, made from the slag—waste, worthless materials worked up into articles of use and beauty. That is just what Christ does. He takes men who are cast off by the world as worthless and waste, and remakes them. (*C. Leach, D.D.*)

Ver. 33. **The Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east.**—*The victory over the Midianites*:—The mind of man is by nature like two hostile camps. In the higher region are principles of innocence, hope, love, justice, trust, kindness, purity, and tenderness—those angels of the soul—"For of such is the kingdom of heaven." In the lower regions of the soul are selfishness, pride, vanity, contempt for others, injustice, faithlessness, harshness, impurity, and violence, and of such is the kingdom of hell. There can be no peace between these two (Isa. lvii. 20, 21). Life is a state of conflict, both for the virtuous and the evil. The virtuous, however, strive on the side of heaven, and they are assisted by heavenly powers, and by the Saviour Himself. They have often cessations of warfare, seasons of blessing, and their end is peace. The wicked struggle against their better part; they oppose their inner convictions; they stifle the voice of conscience; they smother their nobler impulses; they harden themselves against God and goodness. It is in reflecting light upon these mental struggles, and affording guidance to the earnest Christian, that the history of the wars of the Israelites is of inestimable value. Let us trace and apply the lesson in the narrative before us. The Israelites had been much infested by three nations in their immediate neighbourhood, the Amalekites, the Midianites, and a people called the children of the east. They oppressed them with a cruel hand: they destroyed even the means of subsistence. These people—at least the Amalekites and the Midianites—were descendants from Abraham indirectly, and inhabited the borders of Canaan on the south, south-east, and east. They were at the land, but not in the land. Hence they correspond to the principles of those who border on the Church, but are not in it. They know and believe what the gospel teaches in a certain fashion, but do not love and do it. They are opposed to, and hasten to destroy, a growing and progressive religion. They assailed Israel most cruelly on their march, and came, as recorded in the narrative before us, to destroy the rising corn. They were all at this time deadly enemies of Israel. The Amalekites were the most malignant. It is recorded of them that they insidiously hung around the Israelites on their march, and when any remained behind from weakness or weariness they were put to death by these lurking and harassing foes (Deut. xxv. 17, 18). Amalek was the most powerful foe of Israel during the pilgrimage in the wilderness, as well as the most malignant (Num. xxiv. 20). Amalek has an awful peculiarity of notice from Jehovah (Exod. xvii. 14–16). From all this it is not difficult to draw the inference that Amalek must be the representative of some peculiarly deadly principle, some malignant strong delusion, to which the Spirit of the Lord is incessantly opposed.

There are times in our journey of life when we feel weary and toilworn; when we are tired of our struggles against our evils and our difficulties, and become almost hopeless. Life seems hollow and a blank. We are weary with the world and with ourselves. Perhaps high hopes have been blighted. At such times the deadly fallacy will break in upon us, "Give up; throw all good aside; strive no longer. Do as other people do; get as much sinful pleasure and sinful gain as you can, and take your chance with the millions who are reckless." This is Amalek. Many a poor weak soul, battered and downcast in the struggle of life, has sunk under this direful despairing suggestion. Oh! that men would learn to remember that this principle of despairing delusion is abhorrent to the Divine love. "Jehovah has war with Amalek, from generation to generation." "Never despair," should be the motto of life. The Midianites were not always enemies of Israel. They were traders and intermediate between Egypt and Canaan. Midianites drew Joseph out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites, thus saving his life. That they were representatives is evident from their being mentioned in the prophetical part of the Scriptures as taking part in operations of the future Church, in times when Midian, as a distinct nation or tribe, would long have ceased to be (Isa. lx. 6). On the other hand, in that sublime and mysterious vision of the prophet Habakkuk the prophet says (Hab. iii. 7, 8). Midian, then, sometimes the friend and sometimes the foe of the Church; sometimes assisting the praises of the Lord, and sometimes covering the soul with curtains which tremble before the judgment and presence of the Lord, is the type of that kind of general belief in the doctrines of religion which may lead to something better, but in which great numbers often rest, so as to make a profession of a kind of faith which is not saving, because neither grounded in love, nor flowing into practice. The children of the east, the coadjutors of the two former, represent all such portions of the Scriptures as can be pressed into the service of an inward aversion to God and goodness, but combined with an outward profession of piety and regard for holiness. (*J. Bailey, Ph.D.*)

Vers. 34, 35. **He blew a trumpet, and Abi-ezer was gathered after him.**—*The muster:*—And what did he do? He seized a trumpet and blew a blast so loud that it startled the slumbering echoes of the hills, and stirred to the lowest depths the latent patriotism of the inhabitants of Abi-ezer. The martial notes of that shrill clarion as they pierced their ears operated like a charm on their minds, suffering as they were under the intolerable burden of suspense, not knowing how soon the enemy might be upon them, and might find them unprepared. Now their hearts beat strong with a new hope. Behold how suddenly and effectually the popular mind may undergo a thorough revolution! Where now were all their prejudices and fury and spite against Gideon? Before the startling peals of that trumpet blast they had vanished like a dream. Striking illustration of the expulsive power of a new affection or emotion of the mind! Yet a more striking illustration still of the truth to which we have already referred, namely, that God can make the very enemies of a godly man to be at peace with him, and even only too glad to come under his wing. See how they crowd around the man whom but yesterday they would have torn to pieces in expiation of his offence. Behold how readily they obey his summons, and how confidingly they look to him as the hero of the hour! So sure is real worth to rise to a premium in general esteem, when circumstances occur which call for more than ordinary wisdom, integrity, decision, fortitude, and nerve in the conduct of affairs. At such a time those who have contrived to suit themselves to the popular fancy during a season of ease and luxury are sure to be cast off, and men of sterner mould, men of high moral principle and integrity, men whose hearts are animated by the spirit of a hero, how ungainly soever the exterior beneath which they beat—men such as Havelock and Lawrence—are as sure to be in great demand, neglected though till then they may have been, and perhaps sneered at and despised by inferior souls. And in how many cases in the history of nations have such men as these—the Ezras, the Nehemiahs, the Jeroboams, the Gideons of our race—proved the right men in the right place, when elevated by a discerning country to that rank and authority and influence for which they were fitted above all others in virtue of their sterling worth. This is a lesson of too great importance to be lightly urged. How strikingly does the experience of Gideon, at this stage of his story, prove that no man who is conscious of being endowed with superior natural talents in combination with high moral principle should allow himself to be discouraged even though for a season he may fail to be duly appreciated by his fellow-men. Let him "bide his time." Even in the piping

times of peace, when there are no symptoms of coming convulsion, it is deemed the part of prudence to keep our arsenals well stored with the munitions of war, and a standing army is maintained in continual readiness for whatever may occur. For who can tell how soon or how suddenly wild war's deadly blast may be blown, and its blood-hounds be let loose. And so it ought ever to be with body, soul, and spirit —the whole man. Reason, religion, experience, and common-sense, all combine to indicate that it is at once the duty and the interest of every one (leaving the future in the hands of God) to go straight forward in the improvement of all his talents and opportunities, and in the pursuit and practice of what is right, heedless of what men may say or do, satisfied that in due time God will secure for him the very place which it is fittest and best that he should occupy, in spite of all the opposition of earth or hell. (*W. W. Duncan, M.A.*) *The muster:*—What a strange, unwonted appearance must the market-place of Ophrah have presented at this juncture. The inhabitants had found something else to occupy them now than the martyrdom of Gideon. Rather than have injured a hair of his head, there was not one perhaps who would not have "plucked out his eyes, and given them unto him," had the sacrifice been demanded, such and so general was the enthusiasm for him which now prevailed. As for ordinary business, it was in a great measure suspended, the grand business now in hand being to prepare for war. The sounds with which the ear must have been most familiar at that time were the ring of the anvil, the hiss of the grindstone, the shrill notes of the bugle and the clash of arms. And ever as a new arrival from distant parts took place, and ever as the colours of the different tribes that had received a summons were recognised, how would the air be rent with joyful acclamations. Here might be seen a band of stalwart shepherds and woodcutters from Lebanon, there a crew of sailors from the coasts of Asher. Yonder, streaming over the hills, eager to join their brethren, are a long line of fishermen from Zebulon and Naphtali, who have left their nets and boats on the shores of the sea of Galilee, accompanied by many of their own tribes of various grades and of various professions. All seem to be animated by one spirit—a spirit of patriotism, a desire to rid their beloved country at once and for ever of that hateful yoke under which for seven long years they had groaned, and thus to be restored once more to their ancestral liberties and rights. (*ibid.*)

Vers. 36–40. **I will put a fleece of wool in the floor.**—*Gideon's request:*—1. Impossible though it may be to acquit Gideon of unreasonableness, in demanding farther proofs of the certainty wherewith he might rely on the presence and blessing of the Lord on his perilous undertaking, we cannot deny that he displayed at the same time a becoming and praiseworthy concern lest he should be deserted of Him. 2. Again, in the kind and condescending manner in which it pleased the Lord to accommodate Himself to Gideon's infirmity, and to allow him to put Him to the proof, may we not recognise a pleasing evidence that such concern as that to which we have referred—such solicitude and nervous apprehension lest there be some mistake on his part—is far from being displeasing to Him. Oh, what a tender, sympathising, long-suffering, easy-to-be-entreated High Priest is He with whom we have to do! Instead of upbraiding Gideon with his unbelief in spite of all that had passed, He bears with him (oh, with what marvellous condescension, and slowness of wrath!) and at once yields His assent to the proposal. Well says good Bishop Hall, in his meditations on this passage: "What tasks is God content to be set by our infirmity!" 3. From this incident in the life of Gideon we may also learn this lesson: that every believer needs fresh supplies of grace and strength for every new turn in the affairs of his soul, and for every new phase in the spiritual conflict. Whoever thinks of finding fault with a man, on the ground of a defect in faith, because he goes so often to the throne of grace, or because he comes "boldly to obtain mercy to pardon, and grace to help"? Nay, rather would he not justly expose himself to the charge of ignorance and presumption, if, on the pretext or plea that he has already received the promise, "as thy days, so shall thy strength be," he should go forth to do battle with his spiritual adversaries without repairing afresh to the fountain of all spiritual blessing, and asking as Gideon asked? (*Ibid.*) *The miracle of the dew and the fleece:*—The state of Gideon's mind, if we may judge from these words, seems to have been that of the man who cried, "Lord I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." He had already experienced the power of God to be on his side, by the touching of the rock and the consuming of the sacrifice. He had been already assured of the favour of God towards him, by the declaration of the angel—"The Lord is with thee." Yet he

seeks further assurance. We must, not, however, too hastily condemn Gideon in this matter. The assurances which he had before received had given him strength equal to his day. In that strength he had already thrown down the altar of Baal, and cut down the grove that was by it, and this at the risk of his life. But here he is called to new duties; we cannot, therefore, wonder at his seeking new assurances. So fights the soldier of the Cross "the good fight of faith," against the world, the flesh, and the devil, under the banner of the Captain of his salvation. The world wonders to see him so continually going to his God in prayer, for fresh tokens of His favour; but they do not know as he does the necessity for such renewed applications. Many a shameful defeat would be spared Israel if they were more careful to assure themselves of God's presence and blessing in what they undertake, even if they sought again and again for the tokens. It would prevent many mistakes, for instance, with regard to what are termed providences. How apt are we to interpret them in such a manner as to suit the secret inclinations of our own minds! The Christian finds, frequently, that "a deceived heart hath turned him aside" in this matter. "Such a circumstance," he says, "is certainly an opening in providence"; when, if the truth were known, it is an opening which he has himself made to gratify his wishes, and not an opening made by God in the course of His providence. "Let me prove, I pray thee, yet once more with the fleece." In pursuing our subject we may notice—1. The condescension of God in the performance of this twofold miracle. Gideon's doubts and fears prevail, and he goes to God for courage and confirmation, and he obtains them. He asks still further, and he still obtains. What doctrine does it teach? It tells us that "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and of great goodness." "The bruised reed He will not break, and the smoking flax He will not quench." 2. Some spiritual uses to which this miracle may be applied. (1) We may learn from this emblem that God is a sovereign God, and giveth none account of His matters. We behold some nations scourged with famine, pestilence, and the sword, while others are enjoying plenty, health, and peace. We see vast parts of the globe in an unenlightened state, as it respects the knowledge of salvation; while others, like our own favoured land, are living in the full blaze of gospel day. What shall we say to these things? Why is there dew on one nation and drought on another? Are we better than they? No, in no wise. God is showing that He will do whatsoever it pleaseth Him. Just and true are all Thy ways, O God, Thou King of saints! (2) We may view the miracle, in the next place, as an emblem of the state of the Jewish nation. The contrast between the wet fleece and the dry was not more striking than the contrast between Israel in her state of national prosperity under the favour of God and in her after-state of degradation when that favour was withdrawn. And how awfully striking when the same contrast is marked in her spiritual state! The miracle sets before our minds the time when the nations were lying in the darkness of idolatry, and "dry," as it respected any knowledge of God, like the earth round Gideon's fleece. (3) But, in order to make some practical use of the subject, we will consider it as an emblem of a congregation under the preaching of the gospel. It need hardly be observed that the Divine blessing upon the ordinances is often compared to the dew of heaven. Thus, speaking of the quickening and enlivening effect of His Word upon the heart when blessed by the Holy Ghost, the Lord says, in Deuteronomy xxxii., "My doctrine shall drop as the rain; My speech shall distil as the dew." The metaphor is simple and sublime. As the dew distils silently, and almost imperceptibly, into the plants on which it falls, so shall God's Word and doctrine, under the Spirit's influence, descend upon the soul. As the dew insinuates itself into the plant, giving it fresh life and vigour, so shall God's Word accomplish the thing whereunto He sends it, giving renewed life to the soul. This figure will appear still more apt, and strong, and beautiful, if you consider that in eastern countries, where the rain is scarce, the dew, as the only substitute, is invaluable. With these ideas attached to the Word, take our text as setting forth an emblem of the state of a congregation, sitting under the sound of the gospel. Is this the house of God? Are we at this moment preaching to you "the truth as it is in Jesus"? Then the dew is now falling, and it is indeed "a time of refreshing." Will it fall upon that careless soul that is as unconcerned about salvation as if none were necessary? Will it fall upon the soul of him who actually disregards the offer of salvation through a righteousness not his own? Will it fall on the soul of the poor thoughtless trifler? Miracle of grace! but not too great to expect from almighty power, nor from almighty love. And therefore we will pause, and secretly pray the God of power and mercy to do this now; that while the dew is descending some drops may fall on these sinners, carrying conviction

to their consciences and conversion to their hearts. But we ask, also, where is the dry and empty fleece? Oh, how quickly may we find it in any congregation! We may find it in those seats where there has been no prayer, but only the form of prayer; we may find it in those pews where there is no attention to the preached Word nor any desire after the salvation which it holds forth. In short, wherever carelessness and indifference prevail, there we shall find the dry and empty fleece. Oh, let not this opportunity pass without a prayer for grace. It is said respecting the answer to Gideon's prayer, "The Lord did it that night." "Ask," then, "and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." (*F. Elwin.*) *Dewy and dry fleeces:*—I. THE CIRCUMSTANCE RECORDED IS HIGHLY HONOURABLE TO THE CHARACTER OF GIDEON. It shows that there was in him that caution and waiting, for the want of which how many a man has mistaken his mission, and instead of doing the work of the Lord, has made a wreck both of himself and his own work! "If Thou wilt save Israel by my hand." A full consciousness that Israel needs saving; but an indisposition to feel that such an honour could be conferred on him; such is a good index to the character of a man—a disposition to test ourselves. Am I fit? Am I capable? Can God use me? Am I he whom God will choose to do this work? Yes, I think we do well to apply tests to ourselves and to our position; to our religious life, and to our relation to God by our religious life. Do you not believe that there is an influence that covers a man with blessings? Do you not believe that there is a conduct which attracts to itself blessing? Hence the image is constantly occurring in Scripture between moisture and drought (Jer. xvii. 5–8; Psa. i. 3). "He shall be like a tree." There is the test—a tree, moistened by unseen springs, whose leaves are green even in the parched land and not inhabited. See David in the court of Saul. A dewy fleece in the midst of a land of drought. See Daniel at the courts of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. While all the uproar goes on, there the blasphemy, and the tokens of a coming doom; Daniel and his companions are in waiting on the Lord; without wine they are brave; their spirits are fresh, and they are ready for the service of God—a dewy fleece in a dry place. Who are the happy? I do not ask who are the successful, because I find often the happy are the unsuccessful. Setting all the world's calculations on one side, "Behold," says James, "we call them happy which endure." Whence, then, is the spring supplied which will never dry? The calm, the contented, and the hallowed blessedness of the holy heart. How often we find wealth is a dry fleece, while poverty is a dewy one! True, there is nothing in wealth to curse especially, but then there is nothing in wealth to bless especially; because of wealth, it is not that the dew refuses to fall, but the dew will not fall because wealth is there—only proving that wealth needs something more before it can be regarded as really a blessing; and poverty must be forgotten of God, and cut off from the dew before that state can be regarded as a curse. II. Thus, then, WE JUSTIFY THE GIDEON TEST. Upon the heart and the home the dew will fall and remain. Thou askest, "Am I a child of God?" You shall know by the dew. "Have I religion?" You shall know by the dew. Walk forth in the morning—the sweet morning, when the bright drops sparkle on the hedgerows, and behold the twinkling thorn, the rose, the tree, the floor of grass, such shall be your words, and such your mind, your action—the dew shall be on your fleece! III. I shall attempt to illustrate this a little further. For I say the world will insist on applying its test to us; THE WORLD WILL WATCH FOR THE DEW ON OUR FLEECE. When I was a boy it was my privilege to know a very holy man. He had been in the beginning of things a poor man; but how sacredly, how steadily, he served God! He worked in a shop where proverbially all were Sabbath-breakers. He would not break the Sabbath. The master could do as he liked with all his men—it was a kind of old-world tyranny. He would not break the Sabbath. He led a sweet, sacred, holy life. His master was a swearer in the midst of a gang of unholy men. His conversation became the gospel of Christ. By a steady course he was able to provide for his widowed mother; he was able to provide for his sister. And he died, but his work lasted; the dew has not all evaporated yet; the shop is in ruins; his master was long since a bankrupt, and his whole family is in ruins too. The name of the one man is fragrant, all else is gone—it was a dewy fleece in a land of drought. Thus gratitude in the heart, thus holiness in the life, are dew. You shall know them by the dew upon the fleece. (*E. Paxton Hood.*) *Nature's laws:*—Gideon owned the sovereignty and the power of God. So must we. In the matter of salvation we deal with Omnipotence. The God of grace is the Sovereign Ruler of the universe. Gideon believed in the omnipotence of God. He rested upon His

promises. But he wanted a confirmation of his faith in these promises. He seemed to cast his eyes to heaven, and say in language which has often found a response in the hearts of tried believers, "Shew me a token for good; that they which hate me may see it, and be ashamed; because Thou, Lord, hast holpen me, and comforted me." Or, like one struggling to master his doubts and fears, on finding that he could not overcome the natural infidelity of his depraved heart, he turned to the stronghold whence alone help could come, and prayed, "Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief." The Lord did help his unbelief, by granting him the twofold miracle for which he prayed. It was a fine instance of childlike confidence in this "mighty man of valour" that as soon as his faith began to waver he at once told the Lord. Half of our difficulties in the Christian course would be got over, and got over quickly too, if we would but unbosom our souls to the Lord, and tell Him our difficulties as soon as they arise. Now, the token vouchsafed to Gideon was peculiar in its nature. He was led, doubtless acting under the influence of the Holy Spirit, to ask of God a sign, and to choose a sign himself. In infinite condescension, God was pleased to accede to his petition. He suspended the ordinary laws of nature, and whether the fleece of wool was to be wet or dry, according to the prayer of this man of God, we are told, "God did so that night." The grand doctrine to be deduced from this narrative is, that in confirmation of His promises, and in appearing on behalf of His people, the Lord suspended the ordinary laws of nature. I. Observe, first, that it was none other than THE LORD JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF WHO THUS ANSWERED GIDEON'S PRAYER. God, to whom Gideon prayed in ver. 36, is the same who "looked upon him," and spake to him in ver. 14. He was the angel of the covenant, who said, "Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?" Gideon prayed to this same Lord, that He would grant him a sign that He would save Israel by his hand, "As He had said." The answer to Gideon's prayer—the twofold miracle which was wrought—proved the proper Deity of Christ. It proved that the government of all things was indeed upon His shoulder. II. NOW, IT IS OVER THE LAWS OF NATURE THAT CHRIST REIGNETH, FOR THE GOOD OF HIS CHURCH IN ALL AGES. We know not how little, nor how much, other worlds are affected by the redemption of Christ's people in this world. It may be that inhabitants of other spheres and of other systems are learning the wisdom and the goodness and the love of God in the book of man's salvation. Angels study it, the highest orders of intelligence make it their theme of praise, and why not beings in untold worlds which fill up the immensity of space? But be this as it may, all the laws of the universe are under the rule of the Lord Jesus for the good of His people. There is no law but the will of God. To deify law is to undeify God. So to enthrone nature as to make her reign is to dethrone Jehovah, who alone does reign "God over all, blessed for evermore." Time would fail us to dwell upon the many instances of the suspension of the laws of nature recorded in the Word of God. We will adduce but a few remarkable examples. 1. Observe the suspension of the laws of physical nature for the good of the people of God. Although heaven and earth should seem to oppose the fulfilment of His Word, although physical impossibilities may raise up a barrier the top of which no eye of sense can scale, yet the eye of faith soars above all nature, up to nature's God, and rests calmly and peaceably upon His enthroned promise (Isa. xliii. 2). 2. We might go on and educe instances of the like suspension of the laws of animal nature, in carrying out the purposes of Jehovah on behalf of His people. Birds of the air, the fish of the sea, and the beasts of the earth, have all obeyed other influences than the laws of their nature, in doing the will of their Creator. The instinct which they possess, is just that law which God sustains in them. Unclean and carnivorous birds forget their own natures, and spread their wings, and, as angels of mercy, visit the prophet in the wilderness, and daily spread his table. The fish devours not Jonah, but, at the word of the Lord, safely lands him on dry ground. The lions, too, become the harmless and the friendly companions of Daniel, and not a hair of his head is injured in their den. 1. Gideon's need of a confirmation of his faith. The only question with this mighty man of valour was, "Is the Lord indeed with me? Is He on my side? Can I possibly have made any mistake? I do not doubt the Lord's power. If He will, He can save Israel by my hand. But am I certain that I have not put too favourable an interpretation upon His promises? I will ask a sign of the Lord." He did so, and you know with what result. Are you as anxious as was Gideon to learn the Lord's will, and to insure His blessing in your undertakings? Do you make

your daily callings a matter of prayer? Do you pause in your worldly business, and inquire with deep anxiety, "Is the Lord with me?" 2. You see the nature of that proof which the Lord gave to Gideon that His promises were sure: the dew was given and withheld according to the sign proposed. We may regard the dew as a striking and beautiful emblem of the Holy Spirit. (*G. A. Rogers, M.A.*) *Gideon's signs*:—Like other Israelites, he is strongly persuaded that God appears and speaks to men through nature; and he craves a sign in the natural world which is of God's making and upholding. Now, to us the sign Gideon asked may appear rude, uncouth, and without any moral significance. A fleece which is to be wet one morning while the threshing-floor is dry, and dry next morning while the threshing-floor is wet, supplies the means of testing the Divine presence and approval. Further, it may be alleged that the phenonema admit of natural explanation. But this is the meaning: Gideon providing the fleece, indentifies himself with it. It is his fleece, and if God's dew drenches it, that will imply that God's power shall enter Gideon's soul and abide in it, even though Israel be dry as the dusty floor. The thought is at once simple and profound, childlike and Hebrew-like, and carefully we must observe that it is a nature-sign, not a mere portent, Gideon looks for. It is not whether God can do a certain seemingly impossible thing. That would not help Gideon. But the dew represents to his mind the vigour he needs, the vigour Israel needs if he should fail; and in reversing the sign, "Let the dew be on the ground and the fleece be dry," he seems to provide a hope even in prospect of his own failure or death. Gideon's appeal is for a revelation of the Divine in the same sphere as the lightning, storm and rain, in which Deborah found a triumphant proof of Jehovah's presence; yet there is a notable contrast. We are reminded of the "still small voice" Elijah heard as he stood in the cave-mouth after the rending wind and the earthquake and the lightning. We remember also the image of Hosea, "I will be as the dew unto Israel." There is a question in the Book of Job—"Hath the rain a father, or who hath begotten the drops of dew?" The faith of Gideon makes answer, "Thou, O Most High, dost give the dews of heaven." The silent distillation of the dew is profoundly symbolic of the spiritual economy and those energies that are "not of this noisy world, but silent and Divine." (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*) *The dew and the fleece*:—1. Just before the occurrence of the facts narrated in this passage Gideon had received his call from God. Former judges, Othniel, Ehud, and Barak, had been moved by the Spirit of God to their work of delivering Israel from the oppressor. But to Gideon alone a theophany was vouchsafed in order to intimate that the God, who had visibly manifested Himself to the patriarchs, was the same Jehovah ready to save their descendants if only they would penitently return to the covenant. 2. God permitted His people to be brought so low in order that affliction might drive them to prayer, and that thus their extremity might become His opportunity. Such was the result in the gracious ways of His providence. 3. Next, God called Gideon by two revelations. The first, by a visible manifestation of the angel of Jehovah. Next, in a dream of the night, Jehovah commanded him to throw down his father's altar to Baal. 4. As in the first manifestation Jehovah acknowledged Gideon, so in this second one He required Gideon to acknowledge Jehovah. Gideon accordingly, with ten men of his servants, overthrew Baal's altar, and cut down the Asherah pillar by it in the night; for he durst not do it by day through fear of his father's household and the men of the city. But God does not reject the first sincere efforts of His children to do His will, though attended with timidity (John iii. 2, xix. 38). Gideon did not by secrecy effect his purpose of escaping detection. 5. Then followed the gathering together of the enemy to the plain of Jezreel: And the Spirit of Jehovah clothed Gideon as with a coat of mail. At his trumpet-call his own clan, recognising the champion and deliverer of Israel in him who, as an iconoclast, braved Baal's revenge with impunity, was the first to rally around him. The neighbouring tribes, Manasseh, Zebulun, and Naphtali, next obeyed his summons by heralds. But still there were remnants of doubt and fear in Gideon, though he was very different in respect to faith from what he was when the Angel of Jehovah first appeared to him. 6. But before setting out on his perilous enterprise with the assembled army, Gideon desired a further sign from God to assure him of success. His prayer for a sign did not betoken want of faith, but weakness of faith. The flesh strove against the willing spirit, and so created misgivings and fears. The sign which Gideon asked, and which the Lord vouchsafed, was one especially significant. The dew was in the Holy Land a leading source of fertility (Gen. xxvii. 28; Deut. xxxiii. 13). Thus

dew naturally became the image of spiritual influences. The type may be viewed in a threefold relation. I. THE DEW IN RELATION TO GIDEON'S ENTERPRISE. To Gideon in his fears the filling of the fleece with dew from heaven whilst the earth around was dry, intimated that, whereas Israel was heretofore, through apostasy, as dry spiritually as the heathen around (comp. the "dry places," Matt. xii. 43), Jehovah was now about to fill Gideon and His nation with His reviving grace. The reversing of the sign at Gideon's request, and the dryness of the fleece whilst the dew rested on the earth around, assured him that Jehovah could, and would, manifest His power even amidst the weakness and helplessness of His people in the face of the nations which were flourishing all around. The army was reduced to three hundred. The poor and weak one should overturn the rich and mighty. II. THE DEW IN RELATION TO ISRAEL PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE. The type has a deeply interesting relation to Israel, the elect nation. 1. First, in the past, the fleece filled with dew whilst the ground around was utterly dry, answers to Israel filled with heavenly blessings from the Lord, whilst the Gentile world was a moral wilderness, dry and unwatered by the dews of His grace. It was not because of Israel's merits, but because of God's gratuitous choice, that the nation was singled out to be the Paradise of Jehovah cut off from the spiritual waste: just as the dew is not of man's procuring, but of God's bestowing. Had Abraham, the forefather of the nation, been left to himself he would have continued an idolater like all his neighbours in Ur of the Chaldees, a city dedicated to moon-worship (Josh. xxiv. 2, 3). There was much imperfection in him, and Isaac, and Jacob. Jacob's sons, excepting Joseph and perhaps Benjamin, were far worse. Yet God remembered His own covenant of grace, and preserved Israel in Egypt as a separate people unto Himself in the land of Goshen, like a fleece full of heavenly dew in the midst of a dry and parched land. 2. The dew representing the present state of Israel. The fleece remaining dry, whilst all the ground around was saturated with the refreshing dew, represents Israel in a state forming a sad contrast to the former image and what it represents. Israel has now for ages been spiritually dry, without any of the dews of heavenly blessing which descends from Jehovah, the God of the covenant. And what makes her case the sadder is, she is singular in her state. For the gospel of the grace of God in Christ Jesus is making many a spiritual desert throughout the Gentile world to become a garden of the Lord, blooming with the life-giving dews of the Spirit poured down from on high. 3. The dew representing the future of Israel. The relation of the type to the future of Israel. As the fleece was full of dew at first, and all the earth dry: and next, the fleece was dry, and all the earth wet; so the blessed time is coming when the fleece shall be again full of dew, and all the earth, through its instrumentality, shall be filled with the dew of the Lord (Micah v. 7; Jer. iii. 17; Psa. lxxii. 6, 8). III. THE DEW IN RELATION TO THE CHURCH OF CHRIST AND ITS PROFESSING MEMBERS. Lastly, the type has a profitable lesson to teach us in its relation to the Christian Church and its professing members. 1. The fleece represents not only Israel, but Israel's Antitype, Jesus; and secondarily, His people who are one with Him. Originally He had from everlasting the fulness of the Godhead (Col. i. 19). The fleece was full, but the ground around had no dew from heaven. Then at His crucifixion the Church might say, "Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost" (Ezek. xxxvii. 11); just as the fleece was dried whilst the earth around was saturated with dew. But at His resurrection not only did He live again, but becomes the Lord of life to us. Meantime the effect of Christ's presence as a dew in the soul is "He shall grow as the lily, and cast forth His roots as Lebanon" (Hosea xiv. 5). Prayer will fill the fleece with the heavenly dew. Moreover, there is great danger of losing the dew. 2. The dry place amidst the dew-covered ground is a symbol of the sad state of many a one who remains spiritually dead and lifeless, whilst dews of heavenly blessing are descending on every side. (*A. R. Fausset, M.A.*)

CHAPTER VII.

VERS. 1–8. **Gideon . . . pitched beside the wall of Harod.**—*Gideon's army:*—I. THE LORD CALLED HIM TO FIGHT. The world must see, now and then, the gigantic crimes of a mere man turned back by rival arms upon both idol and idolater, and that by the voice of the Almighty. Well said Victor Hugo, "Napoleon had been impeached before the Infinite." The groaning of the bond-

man in our own land entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. Arrogance, lust, and greed combined to challenge the eternal laws, and thousands went down together into silence, till we could learn the unwelcome fact that God is no respecter of persons. But out of the awful strife came praying souls, and a regeneration in the sources of influence and power. God is known to speak in the crisis, in the hero—yes, even in the rebel. II. THE LORD CALLED GIDEON TO SUCCESS. We may notice the conditions. 1. Careful preparation. There must be selection when daring deeds are to be performed. This is a principle in the Divine government as in the human. God husbands and adapts His resources, though seeming to scatter His treasures lavishly. Have you sifted out the real from the visionary and found the abiding truths which will not fail you in that hour of trial which must come to all living? They may be ominously reduced from all that promised well, as was Gideon's army, but, like it, be enough. 2. Obedience. The open heart learns soon and plainly the Divine will. As, amid all the roar of Niagara, the practised ear catches the sweet notes of birds singing in the grove above, so, in the confusion of tongues, the willing soul may hear the clear voice of its Maker, instructing, guiding, cheering. 3. Humility. Nothing develops a nation's pride like military success. Parade of troops, battalion after battalion in all the splendour of equipment and might of bearing, satisfies the popular ideals of greatness and strength. War is still an honourable trade, and, while it is, meekness will be despised. But, none the less, the King of kings "pours contempt upon princes, and weakeneth the strength of the mighty." 4. Faith. Belief in the need, the call, the power, the method, the victory of Jehovah, was all-important with Gideon. (*Sermons by the Monday Club.*) *Gideon's army* :—I. THE LORD FIGHTING FOR AND WITH HIS PEOPLE. God is the author of war, and He causes men to fight, in the same way that law is the author of sin and causes men to become transgressors. Were there no law there would be no transgression, and were there no God there would be no conflict of righteousness with unrighteousness. War is God's whip for sinful nations; it is His rod of iron with which He will dash them in pieces as a potter's vessel. There is a Divine retribution following nations, and sure to overtake them if they are workers of iniquity. And there is a Divine deliverance waiting for nations and for individuals, sure to come when they repent of their evil ways and cry unto God for His salvation. II. THE ARMY MADE READY. When God has some great work to be done, or some hard battle to be fought, He chooses the men who are best able to fight or work. 1. The fearful were suffered to go back. Moral courage is a Christian virtue. Men are commanded to have it. Only "be strong and of a good courage." "Be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee." When God is with a man he has nothing to fear. Even Grecian and Roman heroes, when they showed great courage and wrought brilliant exploits, believed themselves to be acting under the influence of a Divine inspiration. It was the power of some god in their arms, they thought, that enabled them to smite great blows; and it was the courage of some god in their hearts that enabled them to face undaunted the most terrible foes. 2. The next process was to rid the army of the rash and unreliable. Audacity, no less than want of courage, unfits men for the highest service. Among all the qualities needed in a soldier of Jesus Christ, among all traits of character essential to true manliness, none perhaps is more important than a certain command of one's self, a certain keeping of the body under and holding back of adventurous impulse. Those whom God will lead to victory must be "steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." III. THE THREE HUNDRED CALLED TO GREAT EXPLOITS (ver. 7). Here is the key to human history. Common, ease-loving men are, by their own wish, excused from glory, from heroic deeds, lasting renown, and high fellowship with God in fighting the great battles of humanity and righteousness. They are permitted to return to their own places. They sink down into obscurity and oblivion. Three hundred heroes are chosen to be their deliverers and to smite for them the host of Midianites. Side by side with Leonidas and his three hundred Spartans, the immortal heroes of Thermopylæ, will we place Gideon and his three hundred Hebrews, the immortal heroes of Mount Gilboa, asking for them no greater glory than belongs to the Grecian company, and believing that they are worthy to stand together as the immortal six hundred. (*Edward B. Mason.*) *The best work of the world done by the few* :—When did God ever complain of having too few people to work with? I have heard Him say, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name there am I." I have heard Him say, "One shall chase a thousand, and two shall put ten thousand to flight." But I never heard

Him say, "You must get more men, or I cannot do this work; you must increase the human forces, or the Divine energy will not be equal to the occasion." I hear Him say in the case before us, "Gideon, the people are too many by some thousands. If I were to fight the Midianites with so great a host, the people would say, after the victory had been won, 'My own hand hath saved me.'" The work of the world has always been done by the few; inspiration was held by the few; wealth is held by the few; poetry is put into the custody of but a few; Wisdom is guarded in her great temple but by a few; the few saved the world; ten men would have saved the cities of the plain; Potiphar's house is blessed because of Joseph; and that ship tossed and torn upon the billows of the Adriatic shall be saved because there is an apostle of God on board. Little child, you may be saving all your house—your father, your mother, your brothers, and your sisters. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The sifting*:—And was this the upshot of all the talk, and preparations, and professions they had made? Who more eager apparently to rush to battle, who more loud in their bravados, than the very cravens who now slunk, with so cowardly a heart, from the shock of actual collision with the foe? We may readily suppose that Gideon, while making his proclamation in accordance with the Divine command, would not fail at the same time to remind them of the positive promise which he had received of the Lord, that He would be with them, and of the remarkable signs whereby that promise had been sealed. Nor in all probability would he neglect to point out to them the deplorable consequences which would certainly ensue to themselves and their families in the event of a defeat. And, if so, it might have been expected that all of them with one accord, would, in the chivalric spirit of high-toned patriotism, have scorned the base idea of deserting their colours, especially at such a crisis. What a mortification must this defection have been to Gideon! Yet, mindful of our own weakness and love of carnal ease, let us not too rashly or censoriously judge these men. It were only fair to take into consideration how surely bondage and subjection to a foreign yoke tend to crush the spirit of a people, to degrade and lower their mortal tone down to utter effeminacy. Nor ought it to be forgotten that a large proportion of these men had for some time past cast off their allegiance to the one living and true God, and that it is not improbable that conscience, which makes cowards of the bravest, might have had something to do with the retrograde movement which they so rapidly adopted. At the same time, however it may be palliated or accounted for, there can be no doubt that the conduct of which they were guilty was extremely reprehensible, and that it affords fitting occasion for just animadversion on the conduct of too many professed followers of Christ, who are ready enough to cast in their lot with Him so long as there is no immediate appearance of suffering or of sacrifice for His name's sake, but who, the moment that real danger stares them in the face, take the earliest opportunity of slinking away and renouncing the principles to which they formerly in words adhered. Such disciples are totally unworthy of the name. They are not good soldiers of the Cross. They are devoid of the sterling principle which is essential to constancy and success in the Christian warfare—mere "carpet knights," who "make a fair show in the flesh," flourishing their trumpets and brandishing their weapons when there is no foe with whom to contend, but bating their breath and altering their whole tone and demeanour whenever circumstances occur which put their sincerity to the proof. (*W. W. Duncan, M.A.*) **The people . . . are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands.**—*Pride excluded*:—Pride hurled Satan from heaven, and turned angels into devils. Pride drove Adam out of paradise, and barred its gates against his posterity. Pride of intellect, pride of family, pride of wealth, pride of power, are adamantine chains, which bind men in fetters of sin. Boasting and vainglory are inherent to fallen nature. Angels, archangels, and cherubim, who stand in the unveiled presence of Jehovah, are the most humble of God's creatures the most conscious of their own unworthiness. But fallen man ever boasts of his sufficiency, his goodness, his wisdom, his power. He will not believe that he can do nothing, and that God must do everything for his deliverance. Now, pride is a blind sin. It is an illogical sin. It has lost all sound logic in theology. Let man help grace to save him, and what would be the result? Why, just in proportion that man helped God he would "vaunt himself" against God. He would claim a share of God's glory. Now, God will not give His glory to another. He is jealous of His own honour, majesty, glory. I. WE HAVE A REMARKABLE INSTANCE OF THE LORD'S JEALOUSY OF HIS OWN HONOUR AND GLORY. Salvation is essentially for the happiness of God's people. But it is supremely for the glory of God. The Lord gives the

victory to Israel as a free gift. Now, the salvation of the sinner is just as much a free gift as was Gideon's victory. There is no more fitness in the creature to win heaven than there was power in these three hundred to win the victory. We are as powerless to help ourselves, as were they. Our calling, repentance, adoption, sanctification, are a free gift. II. Now mark MAN'S TENDENCY TO VAUNT HIMSELF AGAINST THE LORD. We may truly say of every man what Joash said to Amaziah, "Thine heart lifteth thee up to boast." Vainglory is natural to the human heart. In the fable of the ancients the fly that sat on the axletree of the chariot-wheel gave out that she made the glorious dust of the chariot. Sin is proud. It exalts itself at the expense of God's glory. When, therefore, the Lord visits the sinner with grace, grace is at once opposed by pride. "I will save thee," saith the Lord. "Be it so," saith the sinner. But "I will save thee freely," saith the Lord. "Freely?" saith the sinner. "But what am I to do? Am I to do nothing? Are my good works to go for nothing? God! I thank thee that I am not so bad as some other men are!" Thus pride speaks, and would vaunt itself against the Lord, and say, "Mine own hand hath saved me, or at least helped to save me." Do any doubt this? Think you that we are drawing colours too deep? Look for a moment—1. At man's notion respecting some good thing still remaining in his heart, notwithstanding his fall. How few really believe in the total depravity of the natural heart! 2. Look at man's notion respecting the only ground of the sinner's acceptance before God. The vaunting of the first-named evil is against God the Holy Ghost; boasting that He need not do everything in the soul. This vaunting is against God the Son, boasting that He need not do everything for the soul. III. THE MEANS BY WHICH THE LORD HUMBLED MAN AND EXALTED HIMSELF. 1. The reduction of external means may be God's way of giving success. Man's extremity is God's opportunity. Be not discouraged, then, if God cut down numerical strength. What if 32,000 be reduced to 300? "If God be for us, who can be against us?" "What are all the hosts of Midian to the Lord?" 2. The Lord thus manifests His tender care for His own people. The ungodly, like the Midianites, count the people of God "as sheep for the slaughter." They think they can swallow them up as in a moment. But they forget that the Lord regards the cause of His people as His own. They forget that He hath said, "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of Mine eye." Oh! how sensitive is God to all injuries done wrongfully to the least of His saints! (*G. A. Rogers, M.A.*) **Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return.** —*The trial of Gideon's army by the proclamation*:—Gideon has now obtained the necessary assurance of God's favour; he takes courage to blow the trumpet, and to collect the forces of the various tribes, if haply, after all the strength he can procure, Israel may be able to stand before those fearful enemies, the Midianites. We may conceive Gideon in such a season of anxiety, hoping that more hearts will be stirred up for the arduous contest, when lo, the Lord says unto Gideon, "The people are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands." What a majesty there is in these words! In consequence of this intimation, Gideon's faith is to be tried by the lessening of his army upon the very eve of battle; and the courage of the army is to be tried, that it may be seen that "with God it is a little thing to save by many or by few." As this trial respected Gideon, it was no slight one. To see, on the one hand, the Midianites "as grasshoppers for multitude," and, on the other hand, twenty-two thousand turning their backs on their enemies at the very first sound of the trumpet, must have been a fearful sight indeed. It must have driven him for consolation to God's own promise. We may see in it a picture of the outward and visible Church of Christ militant here on earth. Nay, to make the picture more striking still, it may be called a representation of the various congregations of which that outward and visible Church is composed. What is a congregation of professing Christians but an army enlisted under the banner of the Cross; soldiers engaged to contend with one common army, which would hold them in a bondage worse than Midian's? And what is every faithful minister of the gospel but the leader of this host, the Gideon of the army? And what is the preaching of the gospel but the "proclamation" which calls our people to the battle against the Lord's enemies and theirs? We can tell them of a better sacrifice than Gideon's having been accepted on their behalf; we can point to "the Angel of the covenant" Himself, and say, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." We can testify that the enemy against whom we are called to fight has been already vanquished; that the Captain of our salvation has "led captivity captive," that He has "overcome death, and him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." Did Gideon represent the "dew" upon the fleece and on

the earth, as an encouragement to his followers? We can testify that the very "dew" of the heavenly favour and blessing is even now poured out abundantly on the means of grace, moistening many a dry fleece and fructifying many a barren spot; and that the word of prophecy and promise is as sure as ever, that "God will be as the dew to His Israel." And if we have greater encouragements than Gideon to offer, we have also more fearful warnings to hold out. We call to remembrance the baptismal vow by which each is bound to "fight the good fight of faith." We tell our hearers of the awful consequences of being taken captive by the enemy. It may be asked, "Is it possible that, with such tremendous consequences hanging on the battle, men should not answer to the call? Alas! so it is. The spirit that is in them is one of cowardly inactivity, and it "cleaveth unto the dust." They need a new heart and a new spirit to be put into them before they will enter upon the warfare against sin and Satan, a heart actuated by the principle (the only constraining principle) of love. In ver. 34. of the former chapter we read, "But the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon," and then "he blew the trumpet." So the same Spirit must come upon him that leads, and upon them that follow, before the gospel trumpet will be blown effectually. This trumpet we would blow to-day. We blow it in the ears of those who, like Gideon's army, appear to be all equally "on the Lord's side"; but "the Lord knoweth them that are His." Gideon's proclamation, too, shall be ours: "Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return, and depart from Mount Gilead." It is right to sound this proclamation, that men may "count the cost." If we speak of religion as a life of enjoyment, we testify of it also that it is a life of self-denial. But if "the Spirit of the Lord" come upon those who hear this "proclamation," then these apparent contradictions will be reconciled, the seeming mysteries will be all made plain; and it will be understood that Christ has a yoke to be borne by His people, but it is easy; that He has a burden to be carried by them, but it is light; that He has a service for them to engage in, but it is perfect freedom. Depending upon "the Spirit of God" to make known these "things of God," we are to set before you good and evil, bitter and sweet, life and death, and then to say, "Choose you this day." Now, if the whisperings of men's consciences could be heard in the pulpit, as they are heard in heaven, what reply, I ask you, would yours be found to make to this appeal? If the motion of the body correspond with that of the mind, would there be none discovered among us "departing from Mount Gilead"? Would there be no man found to steal away from the spiritual battle through fear? Let conscience judge. Or if the reasons which urged the "fearful" to depart were to be given in as each left the field, what would they present? One is "afraid" that the service of Christ is too austere; it requires too many privations. He is unwilling to renounce a sin he loves. Another is "afraid" of being ridiculed or despised for entering decidedly on a religious course of life. He is ashamed of Jesus. A third is "afraid" of being "righteous overmuch." Tell me, is the soldier "afraid" of being thought too zealous when fighting in his country's cause? Is the patriot "afraid" of being thought to love his native land too much when called upon to act in defence of its laws or its liberty? Time would fail to enumerate all the fears of the faint-hearted. Some are "afraid" of sacrificing their worldly subsistence. "What is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Others "depart from Mount Gilead" for fear of persecution. When we exhort them as soldiers of the Cross, they listen perhaps to our exhortation; when we tell them of a warfare to be accomplished, they hearken possibly to the discourse; when we point out the enemy, all appear outwardly to be ready to engage; but when we say, "Come now, and testify by your lives that you are in earnest in your profession, that you mean what you say when you declare without reserve, "Here we offer and present unto Thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls, and bodies!" how many depart! how few remain! We close with a word of encouragement to those who still keep their post in the field of battle. To such we say, "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God," &c. (*F. Elwin.*) *A sifting among the defenders of the faith*:—The men who had hastily snatched their fathers' swords and pikes of which they were half-afraid represent to us certain modern defenders of Christianity—those who carry edged weapons of inherited doctrine with which they dare not strike home. The great battle-axes of reprobation, of eternal judgment, of Divine severity against sin once wielded by strong hands, how they tremble and swerve in the grasp of many a modern dialectician! The sword of the old creed, that once, like Excalibar, cleft helmets and breastplates through, how often it maims the hands that try to use it.

but want alike the strength and the cunning. Too often we see a wavering blow struck that draws not a drop of blood nor even dents a shield, and the next thing is that the knight has run to cover behind some old bulwark, long riddled and dilapidated. In the hands of these unskilled fighters, too well armed for their strength, the battle is worse than lost. They become a laughing-stock to the enemy, an irritation to their own side. It is time there was a sifting among the defenders of the faith, and twenty and two thousand went back from Gilead. Is the truth of God become mere tin or lead that no new sword can be fashioned from it, no blade of Damascus prim and keen? Are there no gospel armourers fit for the task? Where the doctrinal contest is maintained by men who are not to the depth of their souls, sure of the creeds they found on, by men who have no vision of the severity of God and the meaning of redemption, it ends only in confusion to themselves and those who are with them. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*) *Backing out of God's service*:—We have here a striking evidence of the different estimate men make of danger and hard work at a distance and at hand. The large numbers of the Christian army are singularly made up—are made up by those who are bold in intention, brave at home, but cowards in the field; they answer, or seem to answer, God's summons at first, but take the earliest opportunity of backing out of their engagements. Many persons, when you speak to them of this and that useful undertaking, seem quite to enjoy the prospect of engaging in it, promise their services, and actually appear at the rendezvous; but the actual sight of the destitution, the disease, the ignorance, the incivility, the lying and fraudulent selfishness with which they must cope, quite frightens them, and they avail themselves of the first plausible opening to escape. And it is better they should do so, for by remaining, their faint-heartedness would be contagious, and unnerve their comrades. Every one knows how easy it is to work alongside of a cheery, bright, hopeful spirit; how difficult to bear up against the continual complaint and fear and wretchedness of the cowardly. Such, therefore, God rejects from His army. (*Marcus Dods, D.D.*) *Why were the fearful dismissed?*—Because fear is contagious; and, in undiciplined armies like Gideon's, panic, once started, spreads swiftly, and becomes frenzied confusion. The same thing is true in the work of the Church to-day. Who that has had much to do with guiding its operations has not groaned over the dead weight of the timid and sluggish souls, who always see difficulties and never the way to get over them? And who that has had to lead a company of Christian men has not often been ready to wish that he could sound out Gideon's proclamation, and bid the fearful and afraid take away the chilling encumbrance of their presence, and leave him with thinned ranks of trusty men? Cowardice, dressed up as cautious prudence, weakens the efficiency of every regiment in Christ's army. Another reason for getting rid of the fearful is that fear is the opposite of faith, and that therefore, where it is uppermost the door by which God's power can enter to strengthen is closed. Not that faith must be free of all admixture of fear, but that it must subdue fear, if a man is to be God's warrior, fighting in His strength. Many a tremor would rock the hearts of the ten thousand who remained, but they so controlled their terror that it did not overcome their faith. We do not need, for our efficiency in Christ's service, complete exemption from fear, but we do need to make the psalmist's resolve ours: "I will trust, and not be afraid." Terror shuts the door against the entrance of the grace which makes us conquerors, and so fulfils its own forebodings; faith opens the door, and so fulfils its own confidences. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) **The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water.**—*The trial of Gideon's army by the water*:—As Gideon took his men to the water and tried them there, so we would bring your heart and conscience to the spiritual test which the subject may be understood to signify. Are you a self-indulgent Christian? The two terms have no connection with each other. If God discard the "fearful," will He retain the "carnal"? If He dismiss those who are so cowardly that they dare not enter upon a profession of His religion, will He bear with those who have the audacity to live in the disgrace of it? To affect to serve God one day and really to serve divers lusts and passions another; to pretend to be one of "Christ's Church militant here upon earth," and yet actually to make no resistance to the enemy; this is only showing that instead of being, as you profess, a soldier of Christ, you are in reality a servant of Mammon. Tell us not, ye that are thus carnally-minded, of any warfare that you are waging with the great adversary of souls. The fact is, that you are already taken prisoners by the enemy, you are already led captive by him at his will. But the active soldiers of Christ need refreshment, as Gideon's chosen

band did; and they have it. What are the ordinances of Divine grace when blessed to the soul, but "times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord"? And now God says to Gideon, "By the three hundred men that lapped will I save Israel; and let all the other people go every man to his place." We hear no complaint from Gideon. When he is commanded to send the men away, he sends them one after another by the hundred and by the thousand; not knowing when God would stay His hand or say, "It is enough." This is faith, vital and practical faith. It is exactly that faith which the Christian is required to carry into the common transactions of life, and to act upon in the occurrences of every day: "The just shall live by faith." In the evil day he is to live upon it when God takes away the desire of his eyes, or the means of his present subsistence, or the outward helps which he has been accustomed to, and on which, perhaps, he has been leaning too confidently. When these are struck from under him, then the proof of his faith is that he can "trust in the Lord, and stay himself on his God." We are apt to tremble for the cause of the gospel around us when we see many depart and walk no more with Christ. But let those who remain think of the concern which their own souls have in the matter. Have some drawn back? The Captain of salvation says, "What is that to thee? follow thou Me." Is the number of the fearful or disaffected great, and is it increasing? No matter if it be twenty-two thousand. "What is that to thee? follow thou Me." Certainly it is our duty to use all the means which God puts in our power to strengthen our missionary ranks; but, nevertheless, when He is pleased from time to time thus to draft off, if I may so speak, the great men, and the strong men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men from our missionary host, it becomes us to look on with Gideon's patient faith and meek submission; to regard the mysterious dispensation as intended to make known that "the excellency of the power is of God, and not of us." Thus every death of a missionary will have a voice in it of encouragement as well as of warning from our God; and if we listen to it with the ear of Gideon's faith, it will tell us "The people are yet too many." And our answer should be, "Be Thou exalted, Lord, in Thine own strength: so will we sing, and praise Thy power." (*F. Elwin.*) *Testing-points in life:*—Many are the commonplace incidents, the seemingly small points in life, that test the quality of men. Every day we are led to the stream-side to show what we are, whether eager in the Divine enterprise of faith or slack and self-considering. Take any company of men and women who claim to be on the side of Christ, engaged and bound in all seriousness to His service. But how many have it clearly before them that they must not entangle themselves more than is absolutely needful with bodily and sensuous cravings, that they must not lie down to drink from the stream of pleasure and amusement? We show our spiritual state by the way in which we spend our leisure, our Saturday afternoons, our Sabbaths. We show whether we are fit for God's business by our use of the flowing stream of literature, which to some is an opiate, to others a pure and strengthening draught. The question simply is whether we are so engaged with God's plan for our life, in comprehending it, fulfilling it, that we have no time to dawdle and no disposition for the merely casual and trifling. Are we in the responsible use of our powers occupied as that Athenian was in the service of his country of whom it is recorded: "There was in the whole city but one street in which Pericles was ever seen, the street which led to the market-place and the council-house. During the whole period of his administration he never dined at the table of a friend"? Let no one say there is not time in a world like this for social intercourse, for literary and scientific pursuits or the practice of the arts. The plan of God for men means life in all possible fulness and entrance into every field in which power can be gained. His will for us is that we should give to the world as Christ gave in free and uplifting ministry, and as a man can only give what he has first made his own, the Christian is called to self-culture as full as the other duties of life will permit. He cannot explore too much, he cannot be too well versed in the thoughts and doings of men and the revelations of nature, for all he learns is to find high use. But the aim of personal enlargement and efficiency must never be forgotten, that aim which alone makes the self of value and gives it real life—the service and glory of God. Only in view of this aim is culture worth anything. And when in the Providence of God there comes a call which requires us to pass with resolute step beyond every stream at which the mind and taste are stimulated that we may throw ourselves into the hard fight against evil there is to be no hesitation. Everything must yield now. The comparatively small handful who press on with concentrated purpose, making

God's call and His work first and all else, even their own needs a secondary affair—to these will be the honour and the joy of victory. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*) *The revelation of character*:—A man is known only when he is tried. And yet it would be a mistake to suppose that this test is administered to us in some great matter, or on some grand occasion. The two most suggestive words to us in the parable of the good Samaritan are these, "By chance there came down a certain priest." The Saviour does not mean by using this expression to give countenance to the idea that anything really occurs by chance, but rather to fix our minds on the ordinary and incidental nature of the occurrence. It happened that there came a priest. He was going on his journey. He had, most likely, a definite object before him. He was not thinking, probably, of his own character. Least of all was he dreaming that he was at the moment being tested. He only made it evident that he could not be troubled to do anything for the half-dead traveller, and so he unconsciously revealed his true character. But so it is always. We let out our truest selves when we do not know that we are doing it. When Gideon led his army to the brook and bade them drink, the men thought only of slaking their thirst. Some, more luxurious in their nature, went down upon their hands and feet and put their lips to the stream to take in a full supply. Others, more dashing and impetuous in their disposition, could not take so much trouble, but lifted the water by their hands, lapping it up thus with them, as a dog lappeth it with his tongue. Not one of them, perhaps, was conscious of doing anything special. Yet, through that tiny drink, each one revealed the sort of man he was; and Gideon, by Divine direction, selected the latter to be the deliverers of Israel. Now it is by the casual engagements of every day that God is testing us yet. By the little opportunities that are furnished to us, so to say, by chance, He is causing us to unveil our inmost selves. For the test is all the more searching because we are unconscious of its application. We prepare for great occasions, thus putting such an unnatural strain upon ourselves that we are not really ourselves. It is only in the abandon of unconsciousness that we make manifest genuinely what we are. We all know how true that is in the art of portrait-taking. The best likeness of a man is taken when he is unaware of it; but if you set him down before a camera and tell him to look pleasant, the result will be a prim, precise expression, meant to be the best, but, just because of that, exceedingly unnatural. But it is quite similar with character. To know what a man is you must take him when he is not aware that you are judging him. God gauges us in little things. He watches us not so much when a great occasion is making its demand upon us, and we are trying to do our best, as when some ordinary opportunity is at our hand. Thus regarded, life even in its minutest and apparently most trivial aspects becomes a very solemn thing. We are being weighed in God's balance every day. Men think with dread of the Day of Judgment, and we do not desire to take a single element from its importance. There will be such a day, and it will be more awful than we think of. But in the light of the principles which we have now tried to enforce, every day is, in its measure, also a Day of Judgment. God is testing us every hour, and according as we stand His scrutiny He sends us forward with His Gideons to emancipate the enslaved, or dismisses us ignominiously from His service. (*Christian Age.*) By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you.—*Gideon's three hundred*:—I. THEN, LITTLE THINGS MAKE GREAT DIFFERENCES IN LIFE. It was a little thing that made the difference between "the three hundred" and the rest of the army—"lapped." But little things represent great equivalents. Little things test and reveal character. II. THEN, QUALITY IN HUMAN INSTRUMENTALITY IS OF MORE IMPORTANCE THAN QUANTITY. We are taught here that success in God's cause does not depend upon numbers. The victory is already potentially ours when we use the right means in the right spirit. The great want of the Church is not more members but more of the right stamp. The only soldiers that amount to anything in God's service are volunteers; men who enlist, put on the armour, obey orders, and delight in the service. III. THEN, THE FEW MAY STAND FIRM, AND DO NOBLE SERVICE IN SPITE OF THE BAD EXAMPLE OF THE MANY. IV. THEN, GOD IS WORTHY OF OUR TRUST AND HEARTY CO-OPERATION IN SELECTING HIS AGENTS AND CARRYING ON HIS WORK. Divine wisdom was afterwards seen in the selection of these men. So it must be in God's spiritual army, in our conflict with self and sin. Evil habits, unholy practices, false principles, must all be pursued, tracked to their hiding places, and remorselessly slain with the edge of the sword. It is harder to live Christianity than to be converted to it. V. THEN, IS IT GOD'S

FIXED PLAN TO WORK THROUGH THE FEW, RATHER THAN THE MANY? No; it is God's plan, all things being equal, to work, not through a part, but through all His people whether few or many. Why, then, did He reduce Gideon's army from thirty-two thousand to three hundred men? Happily we are not in the dark as to the cause; God Himself tells us why He did it. He had to do so in order that His power might be recognised in the victory. (*T. Kelly.*) *Gideon and the three hundred:*—1. It is the small matters which reveal us, the slight occasions. Think not that the Lord is cheated by the world's bravos. He leaves the world, religious or profane, to judge you when you are got up for its inspection. He follows you home in your most familiar moods, your most simple and necessary actions, your frank and free communications, and He sees there the man, as all beings, angels, men, devils, will see him one day, when the veils are lifted and the inner realities of life and character appear. 2. There is One watching us when we are most unconscious, drawing silently auguries of character, and forecasting destiny. The Lord proves faculty in His test-house the daily occasions of life, and hangs it up if found true in His armoury for higher use. Hence the leisure hour is so precious; it tells so mightily on the life and destiny of the man. The soul ungirds itself then, and lets its bent appear. Teach it to love in the quiet hours the things that make for its health, its growth, its life, and leave the work hours to their care. As the man is in silent, secluded moments, God finds him in all the great crises of his history. 3. Keep your knee for God alone. The men bent the knee to sensual good. That was their fatal weakness in God's sight. Kneel to God, and it will cure you of all other kneeling. See His face each day before you look on the world's, and its frowns will not scare you nor its smiles allure. (*J. B. Brown, B.A.*) *The reduced army:*—What an extraordinary difference between Gideon's army as it was at first and Gideon's army as it was at last—between the thirty-two thousand who set out with him in the morning and the three hundred who stayed with him at night! But I can tell you of a difference which is far more wonderful than that—the difference I mean between the visible Church of Christ and His real Church. Just think of the number of our outwardly baptized persons. But how many out of all this vast company are really chosen by the Lord to be His soldiers? But how shall this remnant be distinguished from the rest? Is there not something which, like the waters in the case of Gideon's army, may make the difference apparent between the true and the false? The world, for example, forms a very good test by which you may discern a true Christian from a false one. Look at the conduct of the generality. See how they bow down to drink at the waters of the world! See how they give themselves up wholly to its pleasures and pursuits! Unmindful altogether of eternal things they set their affections upon things beneath, and make them the one great end for which they live. Earth—earth—earth is all in all with them. But mark the conduct of a little remnant who are here and there to be discerned amidst them. These men come unto the waters with the rest. They have their business in the world as others have. But oh! in how different a spirit from the rest! They may be compared to those three hundred men that lapped. A little of earth's comforts is enough for them. They covet not great things in this life; but if the Lord shall give them only "food and raiment," they are well "content." Their moderation is known unto all men. Even whilst they are enjoying earthly comforts there is still no "bowing down" towards them. Their eyes are rather towards Him who gave these mercies, and their desire is to make so good an improvement of them as to glorify the Giver. But is this the only test by which you may discern the true Christian from the false one—the use which they severally make of the world in which they live? Let me point you out another water, as it were, where the distinction may be seen. Only here they that sip are the professors, and they are the believers who "bow down to drink." The water that I mean is the water of the gospel—that water of the well of life to which every thirsty soul is so graciously invited in those well-known words, "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!" I have said that of these waters professors only sip. Even that, perhaps, is a stronger term than should be used. Oh, what thousands are there of men who call themselves believers who just come, as it were, to these waters of salvation and look at them, and go away again without a taste. They just come, I mean, to the preaching of the Word, listen to it with a dull and idle ear, and then go off again with no more knowledge of it than they brought to church with them. Others will go a little further. They hear—they listen—they admire. There are professors, I know, who will go further than this. Yet it is

with the best of them but a sipping at the stream. A little measure of the mere semblance of religion is sure to satisfy the man who is but half a Christian. But not the man to whom that name in truth belongs. The real Christian will be satisfied with nothing short of a full and an abundant draught. Moderate as he is in his desires of earthly things, he has a spiritual appetite which it takes no little to content. Nor is he satisfied with attending any ordinance unless he leaves it with a blessing—refreshed and strengthened for his Master's work. It was only the true-hearted part of Gideon's army which remained with him. These only shared his victory and reaped the fruits of it. And think you that Jesus will not make the like distinction? (*A. Roberts, M.A.*) *Gideon's three hundred*:—A striking story. Especially might it be a useful story for all preachers to-day who find themselves in some little tide of popularity. It is a sore story this on Church statistics, especially when the numbers swell, and we are apt to indulge in a great chorus of praise because of numerical success. How the Lord Almighty had to reduce thirty-two thousand stalwart men to three hundred in order to bring the band up to its effective strength! The Captain of our salvation has strange ways with Him, has He not? Sometimes past finding out. Now, these men utterly deceived Gideon, and we have to learn that lesson—that we may utterly deceive each other. Are our hearts right? When we count you upon our totals, does the Lord also count one, or are you to Him a mere fraction—a nothing? The Lord said, virtually, "Gideon, give these people a chance to go home, and see what you shall see. Say to those that are timid and of a fearful heart, Go back." And twenty-two thousand showed the breadth of their backs, executing strategical movements upon home! Are we going to be blown away like chaff, or can we stand it? Are we wheat after all? And even when there were not so many by twenty-two thousand with Gideon as at first, still they were not dense and compact enough for God's purposes. For God wants His army to be not like a great, big, overgrown cabbage that has run to blades and has no heart in it, but He wants His army to be dense—not extensive, but intensive—sound at the heart, solid as a cannon-ball. Notice, then, when we come to this second action of God's testing of these people how difficult it is to detect hypocrisy. Mark you, these other thousands ought to have gone off with the first batch; they ought to have gone at the first telling. But such an ingrained thing is formalism and hypocrisy that these people stood firm when they ought to have gone. There ought to have been no second sifting process needed. One was enough to lay bare the hearts of men to themselves if they had been simple and honest and sincere. You have the same thing to-day, precisely—people who come with you up to the point of real work, and then "Presto! Pass!" they are gone. In God's great name let me ask what are you doing but coming to church once a week? Now, I wish to say that your seat could be better occupied if that is all that is to come out of you. What was the test which God applied to them in this sore business? Well, I think it was just this. I am not going to say that these three hundred men were braver, bolder, grander men than those who had gone away. I am not going to say that these men were men of blood and iron—that they had no fear, no doubts, and no misgivings. No, I do not think that. I think that they were men who felt their hearts beat beneath their jerkins like any others. They had very likely the same doubts and the same misgivings as to the success of this revolt against Midian as the thousands had who had gone home; only they did not yield to them. They encouraged themselves in God; they encouraged themselves in Gideon. In all their weakness and helplessness they leaned all the harder upon Him who had called them to this fight, in which were involved death or victory. And that is all that God wants yet. God never asked any mortal man to do more than trust in Him. These three hundred men were only flesh and blood, and this was a desperate business. Twenty-two thousand of their countrymen had gone away from fear; but when these three hundred came to the ford it seemed that what was in their heart was not retreat, but fighting. Because when they came to that ford, a key position, an important place, they cannot lie down and give themselves up to the business of taking drink like the others. It was not drinking, but fighting that was in their heads and in their hearts; and they lapped as a dog lapped, so that they were free to see the oncoming of the host, and to spring to their places in an instant. Thus they drank, and God said, "These are the men." This thing called faith in God is a thing that tells. It tinges, it tinctures, it colours every word you speak, and everything you do. (*J. McNeill.*) *The three hundred men that lapped*:—Here is one of those battles of God which are being waged in century after century, crisis after crisis, by the armies

of Truth against the hordes of unrighteousness. Gideon, trusting manfully in his Divine commission, sets himself to deliver Israel from the Midianites. Cheered himself by God's manifest goodness, he succeeds, as men count success, in gathering together a strong army. Thirty-two thousand men was a serviceable army to put into the field to risk the chances of battle with a successful, arrogant, and overwhelming enemy. "The people that are with thee are too many." What? Is not Providence on the side of big battalions? Is it not the defiant cry which is ever rising up in hoarse murmurs from the army of the world? "Every one thinks as we do. You are alone. Every one does as we do. You are the victim of a foolish prejudice. You must yield in the end. The house of Baal is full from one end thereof to the other, while you, you prophet of the Lord, shivering in your isolation, try to perpetuate a failure." Midian comes on with its overwhelming cry, "Every one thinks so, every one says it, every one does it; numbers are on our side, therefore we are right." Ah! my brethren, do I touch on a subtle danger which is incident to societies—to count heads, and to boast of numbers on the books? Remember, the very charter of existence in a guild is quality, not quantity. It is the concentration of the earnest few against the careless and undisciplined many. So Gideon has to submit—there in the presence of the enemy, with a tradition of disgrace behind him, he, a leader of reputed cowards, has to submit to the departure of twenty-two thousand men, leaving his splendid band reduced to a pitiable ten thousand. The fearful and the half-hearted go away, and more than half his host has vanished. Ah, is it some annual meeting we are thinking of there in our guild room, where the leader says, "I do not care for a guild of non-communicants, who do not keep to the rules. Let every one resign who does not intend to live up to his profession," and with a heavy heart he sees the diminution of his flourishing band. Poor Gideon, with his wretched ten thousand! But what is this? "The people are yet too many" is the inexorable decree of God. They must yet be submitted to the test. They are brought down to the water of the well Harod near where they were encamped, to be tried with the test of thirst, which has so often proved the value of disciplined troops. "By the three hundred men that lapped, I will save you." There are many wells of water to try the guild members in this city. He will never fight a battle of the Lord who, with his badge round his neck, goes down on his knees to drink his fill of pleasure, unrestrained, unmindful, self-indulgent. The servant of the Lord who is to win in the battle of Midian, just tastes lightly of the pleasures of life, which are free from sin, as they that use this world as not abusing it, for the fashion of this world passeth away. "The three hundred men that lapped." 1. These are the sort of members that we want for a Church guild, for they represent in the first place a band of men who have learnt the great lesson of self-control. They were men not to be moved by a draught of water on a hot day. The cause of God had stilled the cry of appetite. Ah, it is not a bit of use joining in a splendid service, waving banners, singing hymns, talking about the Catholic Faith, wearing a badge, and attending sometimes a guild meeting, if we have not learnt the splendid lesson of self-control. "The three hundred men that lapped." 2. They represented to Gideon also a band of enthusiasts. Their heart was elsewhere, when they stood by the water. They barely had time to remember the keenness of their thirst, as they strained at the leash, and pulled at the bridle, the restraint of delay, between them and victory. Only second in importance to the moral basis is the enthusiasm of right in the member of a guild. There are few things more depressing, and few things more wrong than the listless apathy, which men either affect or feel in this glad world of God's creating. As you step into rank you feel what a splendid thing it is to exist, to live at all. You feel what wondrous powers God has given you in body, soul, and spirit. With your senses you reach out to all around you. With your mind you live in the past, enjoy the present, or imagine the future in all the freedom of intellect, with your spirit you are in touch with God. You feel at least you never can cumber the ground as one of those painted grubs who crawl about the earth, or flit about as a creature of the day in bright clothes and meaningless flight, now expanding in the sunshine, now dying at the first frost of adversity. The guild member is serious, he is active, he is useful, because he has the enthusiasm of life, and even more, he has the enthusiasm of Christianity. He knows what the Church has been to him. He is enthusiastic—how can he help it?—none of these things move me, he says, as he passes the well, as he gazes at the hosts of Midian, and his own attenuated ranks. He longs to help others, himself to be a centre of good and a rallying point for the forces of the Lord. We want a band of enthusiasts, alive with the enthusiasm

of God. We are suffering at the present moment from silliness, men who play at religion, men who are not in earnest, men who talk and do not act. "The three hundred men that lapped." 3. Gideon might count on these as determined men. They were men who had counted the cost; when others refused to come forward they had presented themselves; when others went back they had stood firm; when others had failed in a simple trial, they had shown what manner of men they were. A battle of three hundred against a host would mean determined men, and the battle of the Lord needs determined men now. The conflict for each of us needs strength and determination of character. Do not believe for one moment that it will ever be easy to be good. Our fathers found it hard to resist evil, so shall we; our fathers found it hard to pray, so shall we. You will want all the firmness of your will in the combat of life which lies before you. Moab lies in ambush with all his countless hosts, the battle will be hard and long. If you be but an insignificant fraction out of the number of professing Christians, keep on; if you be but a small and attenuated remainder, out of those who have fallen away since you first became enrolled, still keep on. The freshness, it may be, has worn off; the monotony of life is beginning to tell upon you; it may be, the hard falls and rough blows of life have disheartened you—keep on. Bodies of pledged men like you are, after all, the strength of the Church. (*Canon Newbolt.*) *Gideon's band:*—1. Nearly everything great in this world has been effected by a few men, or, perhaps, a single man, who believed in it when everybody else saw only difficulties and objections. The struggle between the right and the expedient, or the practical and the ideal, is always going on. The exploit of Gideon's band was as nothing compared with the daring of the few Galilean fishermen who went forth to preach to a hostile world the story of Christ and Him crucified. "All things are possible to him that believeth." 2. In the next place we may observe that God chose for this great work the man who was to be His instrument, and Gideon obeyed the call. It then became his duty to set to work and collect an army. The result was just what might have been expected. A large number of Gideon's compeers thought it highly desirable that the yoke of the invader should be cast off their necks, but they were afraid to try and do it. They saw the difficulties more plainly than they saw the good to be attained. Even some of those who volunteered at first went back after they had counted the cost. Just so. Every man who honestly assumes a responsibility and attempts a good work may be perfectly sure that ten people will say, "Well done! Go on!" for every one who will say, "I will help you, though I stand to lose by it!" In such cases the man who sees what ought to be done must just obey his call and go forward. It is not upon men, but upon God that he must depend. 3. Further, let us bear in mind that the issues of all things are in the hands of God. We need not be afraid of compromising the doctrine of moral freedom by any such assertion as this. Man has power of choice when he has not power of action. Power of action may be indefinitely extended. God may complete our purposes when they are beyond our ken, and may supplement our deficiencies if we honour Him by obedience and faith. The shortest road to the attainment of an ideal or the fulfilment of a duty is to fearlessly perform what one knows to be right, and trust in God for the issue. We need but lamps and pitchers and trumpets. We must take trouble and be wise, while remembering that the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong. (*R. J. Campbell, B.A.*) *Fit men for the fight:*—God required but few men, but He required that these should be fit. The first test had sifted out the brave and willing. The liquor was none the less, though so much froth had been blown off. As Thomas Fuller says, there were "fewer persons, but not fewer men," after the poltroons had disappeared. The second test, "a purgatory of water," as the same wise and witty author calls it, was still more stringent. The dwindled ranks were led down from their camp on the slopes to the fountain and brook which lay in the valley near the Midianites' camp. Gideon alone seems to have known that a test was to be applied there; but he did not know what it was to be till they reached the spring, and the soldiers did not know that they were determining their fate when they drank. The two ways of drinking clearly indicated a difference in the men. Those who glued their lips to the stream and swilled till they were full were plainly more self-indulgent, less engrossed with their work, less patient of fatigue and thirst than those who caught up enough in their curved palms to moisten their lips without stopping in their stride or breaking rank. The former test was self-applied, and consciously so. This is no less self-applied, though unconsciously. God shuts out no man from His army, but men shut themselves out; sometimes knowingly, by

avowed disinclination for the warfare, sometimes unknowingly by self-indulgent habits which proclaim their unfitness. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

Vers. 9–14. **A cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian.**—*Encouragement for Gideon:*—Gideon felt that he was but the thin, weak, limp cake; that there was a ludicrous disproportion between the means at his command and the work he was to accomplish. But then, behind him was the unseen but mighty wind of God's Spirit, that swept him on irresistibly and made him invincible. This was Gideon's encouragement, and this must be the encouragement of each of us in all duty. That man must have low aims indeed who never finds himself confronted by duty that he feels to be impossible; who does not feel again and again that the conquest of sin in himself is impossible; who is not again and again perplexed by the difficult circumstances he is silently swept into; who does not feel helpless before the profound, rooted misery, the masses of distress and crime in the world. What can one do? We can do nothing of ourselves; God does not expect that we should. But there is nothing we may not do, if the almighty inspiration of God takes us and carries us forward as its instrument. But how, you will say, are we to secure that inspiration? how are we to get into the current of God's Spirit, so as to be carried along by it? How, we may ask in reply, do sailors get to their destination? They cannot themselves drag their ship along—they are helpless in this respect; neither can they raise winds for themselves. They cannot supply their own motive power, and yet they can do all that is necessary. They know where and when certain winds blow, and getting into the current of these, they guide their vessel to its port. You also know the directions in which God's Spirit blows; you know the objects towards which God is willing to help you; you know what God Himself aims at and wishes done; and though you cannot reach those objects by your own strength, yet if you set your face towards them, if you keep your soul in their direction, if you make them your real aim, God's Spirit cannot miss you—you will be caught and carried along in His powerful inspiration. (*Marcus Dods, D.D.*) *The Midianite soldier: the power of the little:*—1. A great end reached by most insignificant instrumentality. 2. The influence it had upon the mind of Gideon. I. AN ARGUMENT FOR SPECIAL PROVIDENCE. The little and the great are not only inseparable parts of a whole, but what is called the little sometimes creates and sometimes destroys the great. II. A LESSON FOR OUR EVERYDAY LIFE. 1. Despise not things of humble aspect. To do so is—(1) Unmanly; (2) unrighteous; (3) unwise. Give the acorn time, and it shall become a forest, and cover oceans with the fleets of nations; give the little rill, starting from the solitude of the hills, time, and it shall become a river bearing on its bosom the wealth of kingdoms. 2. Cultivate an appreciation of the little. The observation of little events has done wonders before now. The fall of an apple unfolded the true theory of the material universe. The rushing of a little steam from a kettle led to the introduction of that steam power which has already almost changed the face of the world. A feather shows how the wind blows, and an insignificant event may indicate the direction of an eternal law. Mark little tendencies of character; small wishes and preferences may often throw a flood of light upon your spiritual history. Respect little virtues. Shun little sins. 3. Recognise God's presence in the minute as well as the vast. (*Homilist.*) *The dream of the barley cake:*—I. THE STRIKING PROVIDENCE which must have greatly refreshed Gideon. It may appear to be a little thing; but an occurrence is none the less wonderful because it appears to be insignificant. God is as Divine in the small as in the stupendous, as glorious in the dream of a soldier as in the flight of a seraph. 1. Now observe, first, the providence of God that this man should have dreamed just then, and that he should have dreamed that particular dream. Dreamland is chaos, but the hand of the God of order is here. God is not asleep when we are asleep; God is not dreaming when we are. 2. Further, I cannot but admire that this man should be moved to tell his dream to his fellow. It is not everybody that tells his dream at night; he usually waits till the morning. God ruleth men's idle tongues as well as their dreaming brains, and He can make a talkative soldier in the camp say just as much and just as little as will subserve the purposes of wisdom. 3. It is remarkable that the man should tell his dream just when Gideon and Phurah had come near. God has so arranged the whole history of men, and angels, and the regions of the dead, that each event occurs at the right moment so as to effect another event, and that other event brings forth a third, and all things work together for good. O child of God, when you are troubled it is because you fancy

that you are alone; but you are not alone; the Eternal Worker is with you. Oh, for a little heavenly eyesalve to touch our eyes that we may perceive the presence of the Lord in all things. The stars in their courses are fighting for the cause of God. Our allies are everywhere. God will summon them at the right moment. II. THE COMFORTABLE TRIFLE which Gideon had thus met with. It was a dream, and therefore a trifle, and yet he took comfort from it. We are all the creatures of sentiment as well as of reason, and hence we are often strongly affected by little things. Gideon is cheered by a dream of a barley cake. When Robert Bruce had been frequently beaten in battle, he despaired of winning the crown of Scotland; but when he lay hidden in the loft among the hay and straw, he saw a spider trying to complete her web after he had broken the thread many times. As he saw the insect begin again, and yet again, until she had completed her net for the taking of her prey, he said to himself, "If this spider perseveres and conquers, so will I persevere and succeed." There might not be any real connection between a spider and an aspirant to a throne, but the brave heart made a connection, and thereby the man was cheered. If you and I will but look about us, although the adversaries of God are as many as grasshoppers, yet we shall find consolation. I hear the birds sing, "Be of good cheer," and the leafless trees bid us trust in God and live on, though all visible signs of life be withered. But what a pity it is that we should need such little bits of things to cheer us up, when we have matters of far surer import to make us glad! Gideon had already received, by God's own angel, the word, "Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man." Was not this enough for him? III. THE CHEERING DISCOVERY. Gideon had noticed a striking providence, he had received a comfortable trifle, but he also made a very cheering discovery; which discovery was, that the enemy dreamed of disaster. You and I sometimes think about the hosts of evil, and we fear we shall never overcome them, because they are so strong and so secure. Hearken: we over-estimate them. The powers of darkness are not so strong as they seem to be. The subtlest infidels and heretics are only men. What is more, they are bad men; and bad men at bottom are weak men. It is natural to men to fear, and doubly natural to bad men. IV. THE DREAM ITSELF AND ITS INTERPRETATION. The Midianite in his dream saw a barley cake. Barley cakes were not much valued as food in those days, any more than now. People ate barley when they could not get wheat, but they would need to be driven to such food by poverty or famine. Barley-meal was rather food for dogs or cattle than for men; and therefore the barley cake would be the emblem of a thing despised. A barley cake was generally made upon the hearth. A hole was made in the ground, and paved with stones; in this a fire was made, and when the stones were hot a thin layer of barley-meal was laid upon them, covered over with the ashes, and thus quickly and roughly baked. The cake itself was a mere biscuit. It may have been a long piece of thin crust, and it was seen in the dream moving onward and waving in the air something like a sword. It came rolling and waving down the hill till it came crash against the pavilion of the prince of Midian, and turned the tent completely over, so that it lay in ruins. 1. Now, what we have to learn from it is just this, God can work by any means. He can never be short of instruments. Gideon, who threshes corn to-day, will thresh the Lord's enemies to-morrow. Preachers of the Word are being trained everywhere. 2. God can work by the feeblest means. He can use a cake which a child can crumble to smite Midian, and subdue its terrible power. I have heard that a tallow candle fired from a rifle will go through a door: the penetrating power is not in the candle, but in the force impelling it. So in this case it was not the barley biscuit, but the almighty impulse which urged it forward, and made it upset the pavilion. We are nothing; but God with us is everything. "He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength." 3. Note, next, God uses unexpected means. If I wanted to upset a tent I certainly should not try to overturn it by a barley cake. If I had to cannonade an encampment I should not bombard it with biscuits. Yet how wonderfully God hath wrought by the very persons whom we should have passed over without a thought! O Paganism, thy gigantic force and energy, with Cæsar at their head, shall be vanquished by fishermen from the sea of Galilee! God willed it so, and so it was done. 4. But the dream hath more in it than this. God useth despised means. This man Gideon is likened unto a cake, and then only to a barley cake; but the Lord styles him "a mighty man of valour." God loves to take men whom others despise, and use them for His glorious ends. 5. But, then, God ever uses effectual means. Even if He works by barley-cakes, He makes a clean

overthrow of His enemy. A cannon-ball could not have done its work better than did this barley cake. Wherefore, be not afraid, ye servants of God, but commit yourselves into the hands of Him who, out of weakness, can bring forth strength. Do you not think that this smiting of the tent of Midian by the barley cake, and afterwards the actual overthrow of the Midianite hordes by the breaking of the pitchers, the blazing of the torches, and the blowing of the trumpets, all tends to comfort us as to those powers of evil which now cover the world? When we are thinned out, and made to see how few we are, we shall be hurled upon the foe with a power not our own. Were things worse than they are, we should still cry, "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon!" and stand each man in his place till the Lord appeared in strength. Another lesson would I draw from the text as to our inward conflicts. You are feeling in your heart the great power of sin. The Midianites are encamped in your soil; in the little valley of Esdrelon which lies within your bosom there are countless evils, and these, like the locusts, eat up every growing thing, and cause comfort, strength, and joy to cease from your experience. You sigh because of these invaders. I counsel you to try what faith can do. This seems a very poor means of getting the victory, as poor as the barley cake baked on the coals; but God has chosen it, and He will bless it, and it will overthrow the throne of Satan within your heart, and work in you holiness and peace. Once again, still in the same vein, let us try continually the power of prayer for the success of the gospel, and the winning of men's souls. Prayer will do anything—will do everything. It fills the valleys and levels the mountains. By its power men are raised from the door of hell to the gate of heaven. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

The soldier's dream:—There is a little incident in connection with Christ's resurrection which merits careful notice. We allude to the following words: "Then went in that other disciple." Unconsciously men influence each other mightily for good or evil. The incident before us illustrates this. A soldier wakes and tells "his fellow" of a curious dream which he has had; the latter volunteers an interpretation of it. How little they thought that the commander-in-chief of the enemy was eagerly listening outside! Still less did they imagine that their conversation was the means of nerving him to new courage. More than that: the brief talk of these heathen soldiers was a link in the chain of events by which the destiny, not only of Israel, but of mankind, was effected. Truly, "no man liveth unto himself." I. GOD CONDESCENDS TO HUMAN INFIRMITIES. Gideon had a direct, distinct assurance that in the coming battle he should be triumphant. "I have delivered it into thine hand." What more could he want? But see how graciously the Most High came down to the tent of His servant. If a sign or "token" will do what a promise cannot, then, although it ought not to be necessary, it shall be granted. In His dealings with us God "knoweth our frame." Brightly does this fact shine out in the life of the Incarnate One. After His resurrection Thomas was sceptical. He must see and feel or he "will not believe." In this he was quite wrong. All the world over, testimony is accepted as a sufficient ground for faith. The evidence sought was granted. II. GOD ADAPTS HIS REVELATIONS TO OUR SPECIAL NEEDS. Think of Gideon's position. It is the night before the battle: the forces of the foe are "like grasshoppers for multitude," the Hebrew army is stringently limited to three hundred men. Under such circumstances, the temptation of the Jewish generalissimo would be to think that an attack by such an unequal, fearfully disproportionate host would result in defeat. What, then, does he require? A conviction to the following effect: that in the impending conflict numbers will count for nothing. And that is exactly what, in a singular and indeed grotesque style, the dream teaches him. The barley-cake flung against the tent upsets it, stakes, pole, canvas, and all. Well may we pause to admire this exquisite adaptation of Divine revelation to human requirements. The ascended Redeemer has "gifts for men," not one gift but many, and none shall seek a suitable gift in vain. In a certain Austrian city there is a bridge in the parapets of which stand twelve statues of the Saviour. He is represented in various relationships—Prophet, King, Priest, Pilot, Physician, Shepherd, Sower, Carpenter, and so forth. The country people coming into the city in the early morning with produce from the market, pause before the Sower, or Shepherd Christ, and offer their worship to Him. Two hours later, the artisan, coming to his workshop, bends before the Carpenter. Later still, the sailor prays to the heavenly Pilot. And in the warm sunlight of the forenoon, the invalids, creeping out to enjoy the fresh air, rest and adore under the image of the Great Physician. Christ has a manifestation of Himself to fit all human needs. Indeed, what is true of Him holds good also of the whole Bible: it is adapted to all: whatever our peculiar circumstances, we may

find in it something to meet them. III. GOD TEACHES US TO GET HELP FROM THE ENEMY. Who were the instruments of Gideon's encouragement? Not allies but adversaries: the reassuring voices came not from an Israelitish home but from a Midianite tent. Unwittingly, the heathen arrayed against him proved his timely stimulus. Here is another valuable lesson for us: make your very foes your aid. Satan is an enemy. Learn from him and his artifices where much of your moral strength is to be found, namely, in the Bible. "The devil can quote Scripture for his purpose." A careful, painstaking, sympathetic knowledge of Scripture is the grand panacea for heresy and the true palladium of our faith. Temptation is a foe, otherwise we should never have been taught to pray, "Lead us not into temptation." Albeit, it is often one of our best friends. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation." Vanquish it and you are mightier than you were before. The ancient Scandinavians believed that the power and the prowess of each foe they felled to the dust entered into them, and, unquestionably, new courage and fresh zeal are the portion of him who overcomes sin. Again: St. Paul speaks of those as "enemies of the Cross of Christ" "who mind earthly things." The worldly are foes of the gospel; whether they mean it or not, they retard its glorious progress. Yes: but what a lesson those "enemies of the Cross" read us who are believers in it! Their intelligence and earnestness about business, education, pleasure, may well put to shame the slow advances that we make, with heaven itself in view. (*T. R. Stevenson.*) *The insecurity of the godless*:—In every combination of godless men there is a like feeling of insecurity, a like presage of disaster. Those who are in revolt against justice, truth, and the religion of God have nothing on which to rest, no enduring bond of union. What do they conceive as the issue of their attempts and schemes? Have they anything in view that can give heart and courage, an end worth toil and hazard? It is impossible, for their efforts are all in the region of the false where the seeming realities are but shadows that perpetually change. Let it be allowed that to a certain extent common interests draw together men of no principle so that they can co-operate for a time. Yet each individual is secretly bent on his own pleasure or profit, and there is nothing that can unite them constantly. One selfish and unjust person may be depended upon to conceive a lively antipathy to every other selfish and unjust person. Midian and Amalek have their differences with one another, and each has its own rival chiefs, rival families, full of the bitterest jealousy which at any moment may burst into flame. The whole combination is weak from the beginning, a mere horde of clashing desires incapable of harmony, incapable of a sustaining hope. . . . Look at those ignorant and unhappy persons who combine against the laws of society. Their suspicions of each other are proverbial, and even with them is the feeling that sooner or later they will be overtaken by the law. They dream of that and tell each other their dreams. The game of crime is played against well-known odds. Those who carry it on are aware that their haunts will be discovered, their gang broken up. A bribe will tempt one of their number and the rest will have to go their way to the cell or the gallows. Yet with the presage of defeat wrought into the very constitution of the mind, and with innumerable proofs that it is no delusion, there are always those amongst us who attempt what even in this world is so hazardous, and in the larger sweep of moral economy is impossible. In selfishness, in oppression and injustice, in every kind of sensuality men adventure as if they could ensure their safety and defy the day of reckoning. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*)

Vers. 15–25. **Arise, for the Lord hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian.**—*Divine Providence overruling the result*:—THE HAND OF THE LORD VISIBLE IN THIS DELIVERANCE. 1. In the general effect produced. 2. In the use of the particular means employed. II. A PICTURE OF THE CHURCH'S EXPERIENCE IN EVERY AGE. 1. She is still surrounded by enemies numerous as the sand on the sea shore. 2. The enemies are a heterogeneous confederation. Science, philosophy, criticism, atheism, agnosticism, &c. 3. The attacks are persistently made. 4. Every possible advantage is on the side of the enemy. Truth is in the minority, and has always been exposed to the grossest misrepresentation. 5. The inherent power of Bible truth makes victory certain in the end. (*J. P. Millar.*) **A trumpet . . . empty pitchers, and lamps.**—*Our life*:—I. Consider THE MORTAL AND MATERIAL PART OF MAN UNDER THE EMBLEM OF A PITCHER CONTAINING WITHIN IT A LAMP OR FIREBRAND. 1. The pitcher is made of potter's clay, even as man was formed of the dust of the ground. 2. Again, the pitcher's manufacture is brittle, and easily shattered into a thousand

fragments. 3. Notice, as a final point of comparison, the intransparent character of the earthen vessel. If we desire to see the beauty and brilliancy of a light, and at the same time to preserve it from extinction by the rude breath of the atmosphere, we must perforce find for it a transparent medium of glass or crystal; hardly a ray will struggle out of the mouth of a pitcher. The human body is an inapt vehicle for certain strong and passionate emotions of the natural soul. We speak, for example, of a grief that is too deep for tears, and much more for the spiritual emotions of a holy and devout soul. Those emotions are rather hindered than furthered by the material body. The mortal frame is not a fitting tabernacle for the display of the exhibition of grace. II. Consider THE LIGHT WITHIN THE PITCHER; the soul, or immaterial part of man, enclosed for the present within a material framework, the breath of lives breathed into the vessel of clay. 1. First, there is the animal life. And even this lowest species of life is very beautiful and glorious, and worthy of Him from whom it emanates. Like a flame it is most subtle, and, as it were, eludes the grasp and ken of man. How does it interpenetrate the whole realm of nature! And yet you cannot tell where it resides. It is transfused through matter without taking up its abode in any particular locality. Like a flame it glows in the ruddy cheek of health; like a flame it glances and sparkles in the sunlit stream; like a newly-kindled lamp it gradually dawns in the opening bosom of the flower. Learn to bless God for natural as well as for spiritual life. 2. But to turn to the second kind of life—rational—the life of the intellect. This, too, is a very subtle and very beautiful emanation from the Father of life. I spoke of animal life just now as diffused through the whole realm of matter. How does the keen and active intellect of man seek to explore and penetrate through all subjects and substances. How beautiful does the tide of words gush forth from the pen or from the lip! How is the reader or the audience carried along against his will, and captivated by the happiness and beauty of such discourse! And whence this happiness and beauty? It is the lamp of life-rational struggling forth, the spirit within the earthen pitcher; it is the fire-brand of the human mind shaking off on every side its lustrous sparkles. 3. But there was yet a higher life breathed into man at his first creation—spiritual life. And if the two former lives admit of a comparison with a lamp or a fire-brand, how much more apt is such a similitude to set forth the life of the immortal spirit. By the life of the spirit I mean that life which evinces itself in holy affections of joy, love, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. It resembles a flame principally in the circumstance that it aspires towards heaven. Like a flame, moreover, it has a wonderful property of self-propagation. Spiritual life kindled in one little dark corner of the earth will soon, by throwing out sparks as of a fire-brand, light up other beacons near and around it. And, finally, amongst those so brought, there subsists the warmth of spiritual intercourse, which is called, in the technical language of theology, the "communion of saints." (*Dean Goulburn.*) *The battle of the pitchers*:—1. I learn, in the first place, from this subject, the lawfulness of Christian stratagem. You all know what strategy is in military affairs. Now I think it is high time we had this art sanctified and spiritualised. In the Church, when we are about to make a Christian assault, we send word to the opposing force when we expect to come, how many troops we have, and of course we are defeated. There are thousands of men who might be surprised into the kingdom of God. We have not sufficient tact and ingenuity in Christian work. We have in the kingdom of God to-day enough troops to conquer the whole earth for Christ if we only had skilful manœuvring. 2. I learn from this subject also that a small part of the army of God will have to do all the hard fighting. 3. Again, I learn from this subject that God's way is different from man's, but is always the best way. If we had had the planning of that battle, we would have taken those thirty-two thousand men that originally belonged to the army, and we would have drilled them, and marched them up and down by the day, week, and month. But that is not the way. God depletes the army, and takes away all their weapons, and gives them a lamp, and a pitcher, and a trumpet, and tells them to go down and drive out the Midianites. I suppose some wiseacres were there who said, "That is not military tactics. The idea of three hundred men, unarmed, conquering such a great host of Midianites!" It was the best way. What sword, spear, or cannon ever accomplished such a victory as lamp, pitcher, and trumpet? God's way is different from man's way, but it is always best. Take, for instance, the composition of the Bible. If we had had the writing of the Bible, we would have said, "Let one man write it. If you have twenty or thirty men to write a poem, or make a statute, or

write a history, or make an argument, there will be flaws and contradictions." But God says, "Let not one man do it, but forty men shall do it." And they did, differing enough to show there had been no collusion between them, but not contradicting each other on any important point. Instead of this Bible, which now I can lift in my hand—instead of the Bible that the child can carry to school—instead of the little Bible the sailor can put in his pocket when he goes to sea—if it had been left to men to write, it would have been a thousand volumes, judging from the amount of ecclesiastical controversy which has arisen. God's way is different from man's, but it is best, infinitely best. So it is in regard to the Christian life. If we had had the planning of a Christian life we would have said: "Let him have eighty years of sunshine, a fine house to live in; let his surroundings all be agreeable; let him have sound health; no trouble shadow his soul." I enjoy the prosperity of others so much I would let every man have as much money as he wants, and roses for his children's cheeks, and the fountains of gladness glancing in their large round eyes. But that is not God's way. It seems as if a man must be cut, and hit, and pounded, just in proportion as he is useful. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

A good general:—It was said by Napoleon that God was on the side of the strongest battalions. Notwithstanding our present advances, materialism is still deified. Gideon's first battle teaches another lesson. We may go back to rude ages in order to learn the might of moral forces. I. A GOOD GENERAL IS LED, not by caprice, not by the promptings of ambition, not by the desire of spoil, not by the voice of an unthinking host, but by patriotism, by the love of humanity broadly considered, and by the leading of the Eternal. II. A GOOD GENERAL LEADS. Gideon himself gave the example of brave deeds: took his part in the fray, ready to do, dare, die. Consider the Captain of our salvation. He goes before in every conflict. III. A GOOD GENERAL INSPIRES. The men catch the burning enthusiasm of their leader. IV. A GOOD GENERAL WISELY DISPOSES. Three companies. Christ places each where best for him. V. A GOOD GENERAL SKILFULLY USES UNLIKELY WEAPONS. The ram's horn of gospel preaching more affectual than the silver trumpet of philosophy. Fishermen have beaten the savants. A tinker's the greatest name in modern literature. A cobbler a great missionary. A weaver mightiest of explorers. VI. A GOOD GENERAL RAISES A GOOD BATTLE-CRY: "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon." Better than Napoleon's—"Gentlemen, remember that forty centuries are looking down upon you." VII. A GOOD GENERAL MAKES GOOD SOLDIERS. VIII. A GOOD GENERAL SECURES A GOOD ISSUE. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*)

Lamps:—Valuable as the light of the sun and moon is to us, yet there are times when we cannot enjoy either, and therefore require artificial lights. And of these we have a fair variety. We might notice a few of the lamps that are in daily use amongst us. I. THE STREET LAMP. This light is for the benefit of the public generally. But we have living street lamps as well. They give us moral and spiritual light. Every true Christian is a lamp, lit by God with the light of Christ, and is to be like the street lamp, giving light to the multitudes who pass by. And we ought to be unselfish, and whether in storm or sunshine we should show our light. And although one lamp does not seem to be of great importance, yet a number of them give us a light almost as good as the sun. II. THE HOUSE LAMP. The first place where Christians ought to shine is at home. There we must stand up for Christ and show whose side we are on. Sometimes we find people ready to make a great profession in the street or at the meeting, but very different at home. They may thus deceive men, but they cannot deceive God. III. THE PRIVATE LAMP OR LANTERN. This is a faithful companion to us when in the country on dark evenings. We are all travellers on life's journey, the way is strange, and the end hid from our view, and unless we can find a lamp we must be eternally lost. We discover in Scripture the assurance that, "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." IV. THE STABLE LAMP. This lamp would scarcely be suitable for the mansion, but it is well adapted for the stable. And among Christian lights we have some suited for one sphere and some for another. V. THE LIGHTHOUSE LAMP. This is a stationary light, and as such is of great service. Let us as Christians seek to be as steady lights, contented with our lot and shining there. The lighthouse is a saving light. Multitudes have been saved by them. We as Christians ought to be saving lights. If we have been saved ourselves we must seek to save others. (*John Mitchell.*)

Blowing the trumpets:—Each man had one, and each blew it as he joined in the assault. They did not leave this business to their leader alone. Just so should every Christian soldier make it his duty to proclaim the glad tidings of the kingdom of grace and redemption. Not that every private in the ranks is to aspire to be a Gideon—a captain

of the army. A battalion cannot be all officers, whether the corps be Cæsar's or Christ's. While all cannot guide and control the movement of the host, all can assert, with consenting voice and stroke, the merits of the cause for which it has taken the field. Every Christian is not called to the pulpit. But this is by no means the only method of publishing salvation. "Let him that heareth say, Come." They therefore mistake who think they have no word to utter for God. Every man blew his trumpet. They blew together—commander and followers. So do not always the men of Christ's army. While zeal for their Master may move the energies of part, others have lost sight of the point of successful assault, have loitered or laboured elsewhere very much to no purpose. Or their note is a dispiriting one, sounding a retreat rather than an onward, resolute movement. Their tones of brooding discontent spread discouragement through the whole encampment. Gideon and the three hundred blew their trumpets together. It not unfrequently happens that the minister blows one note, but many of his band a very different one. How many sermons preached in the fear of God, on the Sabbath, are utterly negatived by professed believers of the gospel in the family, the workshop, the counting-house. Look at this common and mischievous habit among Church members. Men and women of Israel, remember that if the Church is to speak effectually for God in the ear of a disobedient world, it must speak in unison, in harmony. (*N. Y. Evangelist.*) *A meagre equipment*:—It is always pathetic to read of that experience of Agassiz when as a young man he was summoned to Paris to be associated with a great naturalist. He was too poor to provide himself with the appropriate instruments for the conduct of his work; so poor he could not procure a decent coat in which he might present certain letters of introduction. He was no mean man in the esteem and knowledge of the world even then, but he was poor. He had a meagre equipment, but the very meagreness of his equipment had in it a sufficiency for the thing he had in hand, and in spite of the want of equipment he rose to be our greatest naturalist. **The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon.**—*The finite-infinite—the work of God and the work of man*:—There is a strange power in a battle-cry. In certain circumstances a single word, or a simple motion, may rouse men to a frenzy of heroism. One electric sentence, such as that addressed by Nelson to his men, "England expects that every man this day will do his duty," may be the making of a victory. It brings before the imagination in a moment such a picture of country, of home, of duty, of fame, as suffices to awaken some of the grander elements of the mind. A battle-cry is fitted to inspire confidence in friends and fear in foes. It is not strange, therefore, that the followers of Gideon, so few in number, should seek, as they were about to meet the countless hosts of Midian and Amalek, to fortify their hearts with a stirring watchword—"They cried, The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon!" What strikes us at first as somewhat strange is that they should add the name of Gideon to the name of the Lord. It is not without good reason that this addition is made. Just as great and abstract ideas have not their full influence over the mind until they are associated with some illustration—embodied in some concrete form; so the thought of God, in the height and infinitude of His being, has not that practical influence on the mind as a mere abstraction, which it has when associated with some human agency—when brought down to the earth and brought near to us in the form of a man. Hence, indeed, the incarnation of God in man. And so the battle-cry of Christianity is, not merely the sword of the Lord, but the sword of the Lord and His Christ. Besides, it was literally the arm of Gideon, as well as the arm of the Lord, that gained the victory; and therefore we have suggested to us by these words the union of the Divine and the human in the work of the world, or the co-existence and co-operation of the Infinite and the finite. I. THE FACT OF THIS UNION. As the planet flies swiftly in its orbit, impelled by the opposing centripetal and centrifugal powers; as the path of the ship is the result of the combined action of wind and helm; as the body of man moves freely over the solid ground, finely balanced between earth, air, and sun; so the path of the soul is the result of the combined action of heaven and earth. The breath of the Divine Spirit fills the sails, and the little helm of the human will is allowed to modify the course. 1. The union of the Divine and the human in the operations of nature. God created paradise and led man into it; but He did not leave His creature to a life of idleness. He put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. The fruits of the earth were to be matured by the touch of man as well as by the power of God. As the seasons revolve in their beauty and variety, the creature has always to unite his energies with those of the Creator to bring the harvest forth. And what is all art and science

but man following God, imitating God, working with God? Man looks upon the works of God; and from the union of his beholding mind with these fair forms there come forth the creations of art—the inspired poem, the pale statue, and the coloured canvas. These productions are the combined result of that inspiration which the Almighty has given, and the artist's own earnest labour. The result is cut out by "the sword of the Lord, and of Gideon." 2. The union of the Divine and the human in the administration of secular affairs. What is the true idea of government? Is it not that of a theocracy, or a world in which God is king—a world in which every king is clothed with power as Gideon was, and in which every magistrate's sword is the sword of the Lord as well? 3. More directly is it seen in the individual Christian life that the power of God is working with the power of man. Conversion is pre-eminently a work of God. It is a new creation, and God is the Creator. The wounds of conviction are made by the sword of the Lord. We are born again of God. At the same time, it is no less clear in Scripture that conversion is a work in which man himself must play a part. There is an act of the Divine will, but there is also an act of the human will. We are "justified by faith," and faith is an act of the mind. Every righteous action performed is a fruit both of the Divine Spirit and the human spirit. Every true and believing prayer is at once an inspiration of man and an inspiration of God. In the warfare of the soul the Divine arm and the human arm must both be lifted against the foe; and it is still "the sword of the Lord, and of Gideon," that gains the victory. To the same effect are those wonderful words, "Work out your own salvation . . . for it is God who worketh in you," &c. 4. The union of the human and the Divine in the work of spreading the gospel. II. THE INVISIBLE RELATION OF THE TWO POWERS. We cannot draw a line between the two, and say, "There the Divine ends, and here the human begins: up to this point God has been the worker; after that man is the worker." As the battle goes on, we cannot say, "On yonder part of the field are the heavenly forces, and on this part the earthly forces." We cannot say, "Now God has laid down the sword, and now man has taken it up." The two energies are blended in such invisible relation and mysterious co-operation that we cannot thus distinguish them. There is but one sword between the Lord and Gideon; and both grasp the hilt at the same time. III. THE WISDOM AND ADVANTAGE OF THIS ARRANGEMENT. 1. It reveals to us the dignity and solemnity of life. We are fellow-labourers with God. We are grasping and wielding the same sword. This truth invests life with the highest sacredness and solemnity. If it does not derogate from God's dignity to work, it cannot derogate from man's. The dignity that comports with or consists in idleness is altogether foreign to true elevation of life. 2. While this co-operation is fitted to lift us up, it is also fitted to cast us down. True humility is wrought in us by the increasing realisation of God's existence and presence. His majesty looks down upon us and His holiness looks in upon us evermore. Earthly honours inflate and pamper the vanity of the human heart, but heavenly honours humble still more the heavenly. 3. The combination of entire dependence upon God with the greatest individual activity. What a blessed thing it is to have the arm of the Almighty to lean upon in our daily life! Dependence upon others is not always desirable; but dependence upon God is our very life and strength. The former has a tendency to produce servility and inactivity, the latter leads to the greatest activity. Those who believe most entirely that everything depends upon God at the same time work as energetically as if everything depended on themselves. Those who have done most good in the world are those who have ascribed all goodness to God. 4. Since God is a worker, the success of His work is certain; but since we also are workers, we should be filled with fear lest we be found unfaithful and fall short at last. The fact that an army has a great general —one who is a host in himself, one sure to lead to victory, does not make the men who fight under him indifferent as to how they fight. It makes them fight all the better. It inspires them with an almost superhuman power. Under the leadership of God, then, what great deeds might we not accomplish, if we had faith to follow Him more closely! With what joy might we even fall in the fight, when we know that the day is already ours! But the practical point for every believer is, that a certain portion of the work is entrusted to him. What an awful responsibility! What a value does this give to time! (*F. Ferguson, D.D.*)

Gideon's watchword:—Few things are more remarkable than the inspiring power, whether for good or evil, which a short, pithy, pregnant saying possesses for the mind. Proverbs, watchwords, party cries, have always played an important part in

human affairs, and leaders of men have ever recognised their value as powerful instruments for swaying and controlling masses of people. No Spartan of old fought tamely who had received from wife or mother that parting mandate, "Return either with your shield or upon it!" No Crusader in the ranks of Richard the Lion-hearted, as they charged against the hosts of Saladin, could have heard unthrilled that glorious watchword, "Remember the Holy City!" "God defend the right!" was the suppliant cry of youthful enthusiasm that rang out from the lips of the Black Prince at Cressy. "St. George for England!" was the cheer with which the whole fleet saluted the flagship of Howard of Effingham, in an hour when the heart of England stood still. "Victory or Westminster Abbey!" shouted Nelson as he boarded the great "San Josef" in Sir John Jervis's engagement with the Spanish fleet off Cape St. Vincent; and in less than eight years afterwards he had signalled along the line at Trafalgar that never-to-be-forgotten message, "England expects that every man will do his duty!" All these watchwords had their meaning, their deep and inspiring meaning, at the time they were uttered, but none ever meant more, ever suggested a mightier truth, than that oldest battle-cry we know of, "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon!" Trust in God and implicit faith in and dependence upon His wisdom, power, and love, was the central truth, the central duty, inculcated throughout the Divine education of the chosen race. Trust in God lies at the foundation of all true character; for it is that which "can alone" (to use Martineau's fine words) "render absolute the rules of righteousness," and "save them from the gnawing corrosion of exceptions, and raise them from flexible convictions of men into a law secured on the eternal holiness." "Intellectual integrity," adds the same writer, "moral tenacity, spiritual elevation, all alike involve, in their higher degrees, an unconditional trust in the everlasting sway of Divine justice, wisdom, and love." God saw fit to educate one particular people in this all-important truth, that they might become witnesses to the world, for all time, of that saving spirit of loving and faithful submission to the will of God which found its most perfect exponent in Christ our Saviour. To this end all God's dealings with Israel were invariably directed. Those three hundred men in Gideon's little band did not complain that they had neither sword, nor spear, nor shield. They made the best of what they had, and committed themselves to the guidance of a wise and protecting God. He knew that they must conquer that mighty host (if they were to conquer it at all) not by their own unaided strength, but by His wise generalship. It was for them a bloodless victory. The battle was won, not by their own skill in fighting, but by their obedience to Jehovah and their implicit trust in Him. "By faith" they conquered, "as seeing Him who is invisible," and their victory will remain for all time a parable to successive generations of men. For a parable it is of the battle of life. The divinest success in life is achieved, not through the possession of great power, but by the faithful use of such powers as we have. If God be not for us how shall we prevail? Round your life and round mine there lie foes—hidden, spiritual foes—which we are powerless to conquer in our own unaided strength and wisdom. The evil lusts and passions of our own hearts, and the trials and difficulties and temptations of the world, these are the foes that lie "like grasshoppers for multitude" encamped around our daily life, and if we would conquer them we must fight with the weapons that God has given us, and not be faint-hearted; for we shall overcome, not of ourselves, but by the help and the guidance of Him "who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Nay more, if we would conquer we must surely do so with those same three weapons which Gideon put into the hands of his three hundred warriors—the lamp, and the pitcher, and the trumpet. 1. God commits to each of us a lamp or torch, which is to be trimmed and kept bright through life. Every man has his own torch; his own peculiar powers of mind and body; his own individual character; his own special post in life, and opportunities of influencing others for good or for evil. The work we do and the example we show —this, in short, is the torch we hold as trust from God, who says to each of us, as He said to the Jews of old, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." 2. But then, in the second place, we learn that our lamps, like those of Gideon's band, must not be displayed until the proper moment arrives for them to be seen. For awhile they must be concealed, as it were, within empty pitchers. Our characters are not formed, we are not fitted for the work of life, in a moment. Hence those years of school discipline through which we have all passed. This season of preparatory culture and seclusion is as necessary for us men as it was for "the Son of Man," who, for thirty years, during which He prepared Himself for His short ministry, lived a life

of retirement and subjection at Nazareth. In His career on earth there was no precocious self-assertion, no premature display. But the time comes when we are each summoned to leave the life of preparation and enter upon our life of work in the world, and then, if we be true servants of God, and neither cowards nor slaves to self, we shall be ready to cast aside the empty pitcher, and hold up before men's eyes a well-trimmed lamp. 3. And then, lastly, there are the trumpets. Just as the torch means man's work and knowledge and character, and the pitcher represents the method by which he receives and matures his light until the hour comes for revealing it, so the trumpet typifies the sound of the human voice, the power with which, by precept and exhortation, by uttered principle and uncompromising assertion of truth, we carry the gospel of Christ into the world. There are so many time-servers amongst men, who will not dare to confess what they believe to be true and know to be right, if it happens to conflict with the popular notions of society. They reserve their principles for congenial company, where they will be safe from contradiction, and they go about the world agreeing, like sycophants, with anything and everybody. But let such men remember that the world owes its highest good to those who have had the courage of their convictions. They are the messengers of truth and of God. "Their sound is gone out into all lands, and their words unto the ends of the earth." We have thus arrived at the full meaning of that battle-cry, "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon." It is the motto of our Christian profession. It expresses in a symbol the bloodless victory of the Christian life, through Christ our Lord: the victory which is won with no earthly weapon, but with the "sword of the Spirit." (*H. E. J. Bevan, M.A.*) *The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon*:—A company of English soldiers were in disgrace. Through some bad conduct they had for a while lost their colours, and were in trouble about it. It so happened that these men had to take part in some battle where a piece of hard fighting had to be done. One morning the men were in line. Some distance away was a hill held by the enemy which it was extremely important that the English should secure. The commander addressed his men and urged them on to the conflict which was soon to take place. He finished his brief address to them by saying, "Men, your colours are on the top of yonder hill." It was enough. Their souls were fired, and long before the day was out they had dislodged the enemy, secured the hill, wiped out the disgrace in which they had been, and won back their lost regimental colours by their bravery that day. The Church of God is engaged in war against the hosts of the world, and every member of God's Church has to take his share in the conflict, and must seek to remove the enemies of God. If we notice how Gideon and his men carried on their work for God, we may perhaps learn a few things which we may also practise with some profit. I. WE WILL FIRST NOTICE THEIR UNITY. There were no divisions, no quarrels, no mutinies among them. They stood as they were ordered to stand. Does not this speak to us and with a loud voice? Have the hundreds of God's hosts to-day that spirit of unity which should mark all the soldiers of the Cross? Have we always obeyed orders from headquarters? If the soldiers in the ranks of the armies of the living God could only forget all party difference, and cease to contend about minute distinctions, and present a united front, the kingdom of darkness would soon receive such blows as would make it totter and reel. We have many illustrations in the history of Christianity, of what can be done by a united Church of God. II. LET US NOW NOTICE THEIR COURAGE. Had they been Englishmen they could not have displayed more fibre and courage than was shown. In its conflict with the world the Church needs men of courage. There never was a time it more needed them than now. There are many great and pressing social and religious problems which need attention and require men of courage and faith to deal with them; and in all her work she needs men of brave hearts and true, who are not easily daunted. She wants brave officers to serve in her ranks—men of skill, piety, and courage. She wants the best sons and daughters in her ranks. She is charged with the responsibility of the salvation of the world. She has to make greater inroads into the ranks of the enemy. God is with us, and God can make us brave and bold. III. BUT WE MUST NOW NOTICE THE FAITH OF THESE MEN. It was a victory of faith. Oh, what a theme for contemplation the victories of faith furnish! The Church needs men of faith to-day. This is an age of scepticism, of doubt, and criticism. It has become almost fashionable to talk about doubting as if it were a mark of strength and special attainment to do so. The Church wants men who live in the sunshine of strong heroic faith and power. She wants men who can, in mighty faith, march round the strongholds of sin, just as the Israelites marched around ancient Jericho. She needs men who can go with Bible in hand and win victories

for God. IV. IN CONCLUSION, WE WILL BRIEFLY NOTICE THE SUCCESS THEY EXPERIENCED. It was complete. They stood in order round the camp as they were commanded. At the given signal they raised their shouts, broke their pitchers, and flashed their torches. They stood and watched the consternation of the enemy. It was a victory which was God-given and full. The history of the Church of Christ abounds with God-given victories. The victories of the past are to be far surpassed in the future. (*C. Leach, D.D.*) *The natural and supernatural*:—I. SOME OF THE EVENTS IN WHICH WE BEHOLD THE CO-OPERATION OF THE NATURAL AND SUPERNATURAL. 1. In providence. 2. In conversion. 3. In the sustenance of a religious life. 4. In the propagation of the gospel. II. THAT THE CO-OPERATION OF THE NATURAL AND SUPERNATURAL IS NECESSARY TO ENSURE SUCCESS. 1. This is the only way success is to be expected. 2. This is the only way in which success is possible. 3. The co-operation of the natural and supernatural makes success certain. III. PRACTICAL LESSONS. 1. We should endeavour to form a true estimate of ourselves. We can do a little, but cannot do all. 2. Learn to acknowledge the Lord in every success. (*D. Lewis.*) *Gideon's gallant three hundred*:—I. THE BRAVE COMPANY WITH WHICH HE ATTACKED THE FOE. II. THE BATTLE-CRY OF GIDEON AND HIS GALLANT THREE HUNDRED. 1. The first secret of their strength was that they all realised that the battle they had to fight was not their own, but God's. A man may fight very hard for himself, yet there is a point at which heroism inspired by self-interest fails; but let it be inspired by the love of another, and let that love be centred in an object worthy of the greatest daring, and there you will find a courage which is simply transcendent and irresistible. Look at the men who have wrought the greatest deeds on earth, and you will find that the first thing they emphasised was just this, "We are not come out in our own cause and our own strength, but God's." There would not be sufficient inspiration in any other cause to enable them to meet such overwhelming odds as those which they met with unfaltering step, and at length overcame. 2. As the battle was the Lord's, so the weapons were His: "The sword of the Lord." You notice how Paul emphasises the same truth—"Put on the whole armour of God"; and again, "Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges?" If we are to be God's soldiers we must be armed with His weapons. A young man enlists in the army; there is a sword given to him; it is not a sword he has had made for himself, but one that has been submitted to certain tests, though, alas! they have been more imaginary than real occasionally. It is the Queen's sword, and as such it is her will that it shall be so made as to be worthy of the mettle of every soldier who will wield it and of the empire that supplies it. The soldier is not allowed to risk his life by getting his village blacksmith to make one for him. There must be the stamp of the Government upon it. The battle is the Queen's and the sword is the Queen's; and when the soldier gets that sword he feels that the whole British Empire has staked its credit largely upon the quality of that sword, as well as the courage of the man who has accepted it. The fact that the Queen supplies the sword, and that it represents the power and the righteousness of the country whom he serves, adds vigour to his arm and determination to his assault. So is it with us. We, as the soldiers of Christ, have the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and, thank God, this has never snapped yet in our hands. 3. In a glorious sense Gideon was joint possessor with the Lord of the sword he wielded: "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon." There was no blasphemy in this cry; it was a humble recognition of the fact that God had taken Gideon into His service, and into joint possession of the sword with which Gideon fought. Once again, referring to the ordinary soldier, you ask him, "Whose sword is that?" He replies, "It is mine." Yet he never made it, and never purchased it. You say to him, "Nay, but it is the Queen's sword." He replies, "The Queen gave it me." You add, "Then it is yours." "Yes, the Queen's—and mine"; and it is in that conjunction, "and," which joins the Queen to the poor soldier, that we find the secret of his prowess on the battlefield. Just so here, "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon," was the cry which imparted more than human strength to Gideon and his soldiers. God's warriors have to fight with the world and its evil. The sword is the Lord's, but it is also ours. It is given us so that we may make the best use of it, and that every man who has enlisted in Christ's army can say in the same breath, "It is God's battle and mine." (*D. Davies.*) *Gideon's victory*:—I. THE COMPANIES ENGAGED. Happy is he who is numbered among the three hundred. Be it so that he is in the minority. Many have forsaken him, more are against him. But he is invincible for all that, as long as he does battle with but one weapon, "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon." II. THE TRUMPET'S BLAST. Never did means appear more

contemptible than those employed by Gideon. Thus the Lord teaches us that means are weak or strong just according to His appointment. Weak means are strong, powerful, and all-prevailing, when He ordains the end to be fulfilled by them. When God blesses, the worm Jacob can lift up his head, and thresh the mountains. But the mightiest instruments are naught without His blessing. Now, we have here, in the trumpet's blast, the pitchers broken, and the lamps held forth, striking and appropriate emblems of the preaching of the gospel. They are fit emblems of the weakness of the instrument and of the power of its effects. The preaching of the everlasting gospel is as the blowing of Gideon's trumpets. How apparently inadequate the means to the end! How weak, how foolish! "Men must be fanatics to suppose that men's evil passions will be subdued, that the love of sin will be uprooted, that their affections will ever be turned heavenward, by preaching nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Human nature," says the world, "needs something different. If you wish to convert the heathen, civilise them first, and then preach the gospel to them." But let us turn from man to God. He who made the trumpet, knew full well its power. He would not put the trumpet into our hands and bid us blow if the breath of His power were not ready to go forth with the blast. The dead in trespasses and sins hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear do live, and live for ever. Whilst uncertain sounds, a gospel which is not the gospel, settle men in their sins, and cause sport to devils, the clear blast of this trumpet shakes the infernal kingdom to its centre, spreads jubilee among the slaves of earth, and awakens joy in the presence of angels. We pause to ask, have these gladsome notes sounded in your ears in the dead night of your soul? Have you been awakened by the loud blasts of the gospel trumpet? III. THE PITCHERS BROKEN. Earthen pitchers seemed to be of all things the most absurd to fight with. The three companies might do some execution were they fully equipped. Trumpets might alarm and terrify, but what could pitchers do? How astonished must have been these three hundred men when Gideon said, "Arm yourselves with pitchers"! The result proved the efficiency of these contemptible instruments. They did what no sword, no battle-axe, no spear could do. They held the lights, they contained the lamps. They were nothing in themselves, but they were everything to the enterprise. Now, we have in these pitchers a striking emblem of the ministers of the gospel. They are earthen vessels, carrying the lamp of life. We ask, then—and does not the value of your never-dying interests compel us to ask you?—have you seen this light? have you been guided by that lamp? Has it shone into your mind, and given you the saving knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ? Has it been the power of God unto your salvation? (*G. A. Rogers, M.A.*)

CHAPTER VIII.

VERS. 1–3. Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better.—*The conduct of the Ephraimites*:—1. Their unthankfulness was great, and the injury which he sustained thereby, who ought to have been much honoured of them for his industry and labour. We ought not to look for our reward and commendation for well-doing from men, but to rest in this, that God knoweth our works, and it is enough that we are sure that from Him we shall receive our reward. 2. Another of the faults of these Ephraimites against Gideon is that they envied him for the honour he got by the victory. Whereby, though they sustained no hurt, neither were the worse, but the better, yet they could not bear it, that Gideon should have the glory of it: where we may see a foul property of envy, and what it is. It is a grief and sadness for the prosperity of others, and namely, of such as be our equals. And when I say envy is a grief at our equals for any eminency or prosperity that they have above us, I mean such as are in kindred estate, years, dignity, or in gifts like us. And the cause of this envy is not for that we are troubled as though any hurt or danger were coming towards us from them whom we envy (for that is another affection, to wit, fear), but for that through a cankered stomach we cannot bear it, that such an one as is no better than ourselves should be lifted up so high and commended so far above us. And is not this a cursed mind in us, that we cannot be willing that another should fare well, we being never the worse, and that we should have an evil eye at that for the

which we should rejoice? And because I now speak of the Ephraimites, I think it not amiss to add this of them, that their father Ephraim, the younger being preferred by Jacob before the elder brother Manasseh, the stock and offspring of them exalted themselves since from age to age, and are noted for it oft times in the history of the Old Testament. As in Joshua we read they among others were discontented with their portion, so in the twelfth of this book the posterity of them contended with Jephtha for not calling them with him to battle against the Ammonites after he had overcome them; even as these Ephraimites did here with Gideon. So Esau, himself deadly hating his brother, derived this sin to his posterity, the Edomites; so Ahab did idolatry to the generations that came after him. And hereby we may learn what force some blemishes and corruptions in a flock or kindred have to infect almost the whole posterity, God justly thus punishing the sins of the fathers upon the children to many generations, punishing sin with sin. 3. And yet one thing more note in these Ephraimites, namely, the flights, subtleties, doubleness, and hollowness that lie hidden in men's hearts, till they have occasion to show them, or grace to repent of them. These would now seem to have had great injury that they were not called to the battle, whereas it was their own sin that they went not, for they did forbear for fear of danger, and were willing to stand by, as it were, lying in the wind to wait for the issue. So that if Gideon and their brethren the Israelites that joined with him had lost the day, then all the blame would have been laid upon them by these Ephraimites; but now they had got the victory by God's direction and blessing, they complain on the other side that they had injury themselves, for that they were not, as they said, bidden to help in the battle. Wherein we may behold deep subtlety and hypocrisy, and how far all such are from simplicity and plain dealing, that according to the proverb, howsoever the world go they will save one, and however it fall out, they will provide for themselves. (*R. Rogers.*) *Gideon and the men of Ephraim:*—The scanty information that we have leaves the impression that in speaking as they did the men of Ephraim were entirely in the wrong. If they were the foremost of the tribes, why had they not organised resistance themselves? If they had neglected duty, what right had they to complain that others had discharged it? If Gideon had invited them, would they not have equally resented such an unwarrantable piece of presumption in a mere Manassite? But how few men in Gideon's place would have made allowance for them as he did! It shows how grace had got the better of nature in him. It shows how little he cared for his own interest or honour; how much for the welfare of Israel and the ruin of its foes. That in the very moment of victory he who had been the instrument of it all should be reproached instead of honoured by his countrymen, and even by the very men who had been thinking only of themselves when he was planning and enduring and risking everything to save them all—this was trying in the extreme to flesh and blood. But Gideon knew that an angry reply might kindle mere discontent into a flame, and that even a continuance of jealousy would defeat his purpose of following up the pursuit and effectually terminating the war. His answer, therefore, was one calculated not only to soothe Ephraim, but even to restore their self-respect. The answer was in an important sense a true one. God had overruled for good the very slowness of Ephraim to come forward. It was their seizing the line of the Jordan that had turned defeat into irretrievable overthrow; and, as plain matter of fact, those slain by Ephraim must have been far more numerous than all that Gideon and his men had beaten down. The answer was true, no doubt, but not on that account the easier to give. To acquiesce in a statement of the case, nay, even to suggest it, in which no credit was given for those preparatory trials and schemes, and risks and conflicts, without which all the direct hard fighting of Ephraim would have been perfectly useless—this showed a moderation that nothing can have inspired except the deep sense that the real glory belonged to another altogether, and that Ephraim on the one hand, and he and his men upon the other, were only instruments that God employed, each in the way that He deemed best, for working out His own designs. When he thus effaced himself, and gave up the glory without a murmur that by all fair human standards was righteously his own, Gideon stood at a pitch of moral grandeur that few of the choicest saints in Scripture have exemplified. When we remember that he was no quiet, meditative spirit, but a mighty man of war, rejoicing in his prowess, keenly sensitive to dishonour, and animated by not a little of the fierce vindictive spirit of his age, the triumph of faith and grace within him becomes all the more conspicuous. (*W. Miller, M.A.*) *The gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim:*—The gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim! This is the portion

that falls to us. We are living in a glorious day. Our fathers gathered the vintage with strife and travail, and garments rolled in blood. It is for us to stand at the waters of Beth-barah and gather up the fruits of victory. The world is at its very best. If life was ever worth living, it is worth living now. Great is the privilege, and correspondingly great the responsibility, of those who are appointed to glean the grapes of Ephraim. I. OURS IS THE GOLDEN AGE OF TRUTH. 1. The body of truth is larger than that of any former times. Aristotle, one of the most learned of the ancients, if he were to return to-day, could hardly pass a preliminary examination for admission to one of our grammar schools. The results of past research and controversy along the past have accumulated into a great treasury of knowledge. Each generation has contributed its part. History is not a treadmill, wherein men go round and round, getting nowhere; but a thoroughfare, the King's highway, whereon we journey like a royal troop, league by league, laden with the spoils of the conquest, until we come to the palace of the King. 2. The great body of truth thus accumulated is held in a truer spirit of toleration than the past ever knew. 3. Along with this goes a truer orthodoxy than of old. The denominations may differ, and indeed do differ, with respect to minor matters, but they are loyal to old landmarks. II. OURS IS ALSO THE GOLDEN AGE OF MORALITY, particularly in its larger sense as touching all the relations of man with his fellow-men. 1. The industrial reform may be cited in evidence. Capital has rights, for which it tenaciously strives; labour has rights, for which it vigorously contends. Out of this conflict must come the solution: an honest day's wage for an honest day's work; corporations with souls, and labourers with rights. 2. The temperance reform. This was almost unheard of a century ago. For this we have to thank the fathers who gathered the vintage of Abi-ezer, who in the controversies of moral suasion and legislation wrought out these more salutary methods and passed on their achievements to us. 3. Political reform. We hear much of "civic corruption" in these days, of bribery, blackmail, &c. In the time of William III. bribery was so commonly practised that the king publicly announced his inability to dispense with it, saying, "Under the existing order of things, to refuse the common practice would endanger the crown." The municipal corruption which is so arousing the popular indignation at this moment would have been made little of in former days. It is a good sign—this stirring about the Augean stables. 4. Sociological problems. All branches of the Christian Church are concerned in the discussion of questions which touch the welfare of the community; the betterment of home and society; the care of the poor, the aged, and all incapables. The *liberalitas* of the ancient world has given way to the *caritas* of our religion. We are beginning to understand the song of the angels, not merely in its ascription of glory to God, but also in its expression of goodwill toward men. 5. As to personal character. We make more of character and less of adventitious prominence than of old. III. THIS IS THE GOLDEN AGE OF MORAL ENERGY. Truth and ethics are changed into power by a fire burning beneath them. The Church works with a purpose. A man, aside from his creed and personal graces, must in these times have something to do. 1. There was a time when good people were chiefly concerned about their personal salvation. Each for himself was the shibboleth of those days. 2. At other times the people of God have been chiefly concerned for the preservation of the Church. This was the meaning of the Crusades; in them we find a stern endeavour to rescue the Holy Sepulchre, and so vindicate the majesty of the Church and avenge her wrongs. The effort was not to convert the infidel, but to destroy him root and branch. 3. In our time we speak of the kingdom. This is the missionary age. All are summoned to work—men, women, and children. All are summoned to work for the evangelisation of the world—the deliverance of souls from sin. We seem to be dwelling in the early twilight of the last days. The victory of Christ is a foregone conclusion. His glory shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. (*D. J. Burrell, D.D.*) *The gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim is better than the vintage of Abi-ezer:*—In other words, the smallest experience of the joys of God's people—mere vintage-gleanings—is worth far more than the richest world-clusters. (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*)

Ver. 4. Faint, yet pursuing.—*Gideon and his three hundred:*—I. THE ARMY. Merely three hundred devoted warriors, under command of a trusted leader. But no unreliable material in their midst. Each true as steel. 1. The leader was a man thoroughly equipped for his work. Many good causes have languished or been lost for want of an efficient chief. Gideon had boldness to strike, and

enthusiasm to follow up. Also a heart thoroughly loyal to God. 2. The men composing this army were specially chosen. They were men who knew no fear in the hour of danger nor alarm at the force of the foe. 3. The men composing this army were devoted to their work. Not to be caught unawares: ever on the alert for the foe. III. THE VICTORY. 1. Divine help. The history of battlefields tells us that the victorious armies have not always been the best equipped; that Providence is not always on the side of the strongest artillery. There is a moral influence at work in all struggles for the right which will make itself felt, whatever be the opposing odds. The greatest exploits are sometimes achieved by the feeblest instrumentality. It is not so much mechanical organisation we want—it is life. 2. Human instrumentality. To those who go out at God's command the way is wonderfully opened up, the insurmountable barriers vanish. In every Christian enterprise the work is virtually done when the first advance is made in God's name. III. THE PURSUIT: "Faint, yet pursuing." We cannot read this without feeling rebuked for half-heartedness in our Christian work. Many a time we seem to have made inroads on Satan's dominion, souls seem to have been rescued from the oppressor, but the advantage thus gained was not followed up; the old foe, driven out only for a time, returned, and the last state became worse than the first. And what is the reason? Why do we stop short of full success? Because we give way to weariness. We are like Gideon's men in being faint; but we fail to imitate them in pursuing. (*D. Merson, B.D.*) *Gideon and his men*:—I. THE FACTS. 1. Who and what were they who were "faint, yet pursuing"? The victorious three hundred, who had previously cried to the Lord. Victorious by Divine power, through faith, which produced works; they went forth, trusting in the Lord. Gideon's plan, like Abraham's, an instance of inspired judgment and energy, of Divine influence, not superseding, but exalting and invigorating, the natural faculties; not excluding, but producing consummate generalship. 2. The victors—weak in themselves—felt their bodily wants and infirmities. II. PRINCIPLES which the facts exemplify. 1. The preceding events in the context show the connection of sin and misery; the intention of Divine chastisements; the necessity and benefit of repentance; the required instrumentality of faith and obedience; God's care to exclude boasting. 2. The text, as a comment on the events, suggests that all God's people indeed are called to be conquerors like Gideon and his men—on the same principles. 3. Like Gideon and his men, they are called, and able, notwithstanding their weakness, to be still pursuing. 4. While thus pursuing, they are liable to be tried like Gideon and his men, with foolish, jealous, testy brethren, like the Ephraimites; to be disappointed of expected help by selfish or churlish brethren—as at Succoth and Penuel. 5. In the case of the Christian's spiritual warfare, as in Gideon's case, there is a disproportion of forces. Enemies—numerous, insolent, oppressive. Friends—some faint-hearted, some foolish, some selfish and churlish. The faithful weak and faint in themselves. But God is among His people—their sufficiency is of Him. 6. Not only converted individuals, but all true Churches, exemplify the same principles. (*Isaac Keeling.*) *The victor in pursuit*:—I. ACCOUNT FOR THE EXHAUSTION. 1. The greatness of the work. 2. The fewness of the hands. 3. The lack of material supplies. 4. The want of sympathy. II. ACCOUNT FOR THE PERSEVERANCE. 1. Because he takes the past as a pledge for the future. 2. He considers that things half-done are not well done. 3. He accounts Him faithful who had promised. 4. He has a great work in hand. 5. He looks onward. Fainting will give place to renewal of strength. Pursuit leads to complete victory. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*) *Faint, yet pursuing*:—I. FAINTNESS COMES TO THE BODY BY LONG TRAVEL. Every step we take is waste. It is so with the soul. There is a mysterious spending of its substance and vitality, day by day, in thought, emotion, will, effort. A Christian soul spends more than another because it has more to spend. It has higher thoughts, and more passionate emotions, and nobler efforts, and more fervent willing. And if, through long travel, the waste is more than the recruiting, then comes faintness. II. FAINTNESS COMES TO THE BODY BY RAPID MOVEMENT. A man shall walk leisurely over some miles of road or up the slope of a mountain and be quite cool and comparatively fresh, while a racer shall bound away over the same distance, and at the end be panting with exhaustion. It is so in this respect also with the soul. If a man will contend with all his spiritual energy—with aspiring affections, and in the full fervours of a living will, against God's kingdom of heaven, against moral perfection; if he will match himself for that attainment, run in that race, climb that awful steep, he need not be surprised if now and again he is fain to pause and cry with one who ran eagerly

long ago, "I have seen an end of all perfection, but Thy commandment is exceeding broad." All earnest natures tend to go by rapid movements, and are in consequence subject to sudden exhaustion. The fainting is the natural fruit of the effort. Intellectual difficulties will not melt away. Moral mysteries will not disappear. The law of sin in the members will not die. The law of the spirit of life will not grow so fast, will not bloom so fair, as was hoped; and the panting, eager spirit, after many ineffectual endeavours, is sometimes almost benighted with the gloom of such disappointments, and sinks down fainting, almost ceasing to pursue. There is nothing very alarming in this weariness. It will soon pass away. You have not lost your ideal, nor your love for it, nor your purpose to realise it, nor that Divine hope which kindles itself always by the side of a holy purpose, nor that prophetic faith which counts the thing that is not yet as though it were. And if you have lost none of these things, you have lost no real strength. It will recover and revive ere long, and bear you on again to moral victory. III. FAINTNESS COMES TO THE BODY BY THE DIFFICULTY OF THE GROUND THAT HAS BEEN TRODDEN, OR OF THE WORK THAT HAS BEEN DONE. A mile through tangled thickets or thorny brakes, over rough rocks or in sinking sand, may be more exhausting than seven or ten over the smooth green-sward or along the level way. Some Christians go to heaven by the way of the plain and some by the mountain roads. Who can tell why one is sent by the mountain and another by the plain? why one smiles and sings all the way while another smiles and weeps? IV. FAINTNESS COMES TO THE BODY THROUGH LACK OF SUSTENANCE. The soul, like the body, will faint if it is famished. V. FAINTNESS MAY COME TO THE BODY BY SICKNESS, BY DISEASE. If there be an overtasking of the physical energies, or an exposure to malign influences, weakness will certainly creep in. If a man works in an unwholesome place, if he breathes in tainted, poisoned air, the whole head will soon be sick, the whole heart faint. It is even so with the soul. It sickens and grows faint when in any way, in any place, it inhales the poison of sin. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *Faint, yet pursuing*:—I. The Christian is apt to faint IN THE TIME OF TEMPTATION, WHEN SIN ASSAILS AND TROUBLES HIM. II. The Christian is apt to faint IN TIME OF AFFLICTION. Call faith to your help; trust God's goodness, power, and love. III. The Christian is apt to faint IN HIS ENDEAVOURS TO DO GOOD. IV. The Christian is apt to faint IN PRAYER, whether praying for himself or for others. (*E. Blencowe, M.A.*) *The Christian's twofold experience*:—I. THE DIFFICULTIES AND HARDSHIPS OF THE CHRISTIAN'S WAY SOMETIMES MAKE HIM FAINT. 1. He is buffeted by the world. 2. He meets also with many a source of trouble in himself. 3. He is tempted by Satan. He is often disappointed of his hopes and expectations. II. THOUGH THE DIFFICULTIES AND TRIALS OF HIS WAY MAKE THE CHRISTIAN FAINT, YET THE PRINCIPLE OF FAITH STILL KEEPS HIM PURSUING. 1. A strong sense of duty is impressed upon his thoughts, and impels him still to hold on his way. 2. A fear of consequences also operates. Should the Christian give up his pursuit, what will ensue? Will he thereby become happier than he is now? Will all his trials cease? He feels that greater apprehensions will then arise. (*R. Maguire, M.A.*) *Strength to fainting hearts*:—"Faint, yet pursuing." Why are believers faint? They are so because of sin. Even the Christian is still considerably under its power. And often, through getting a clear view of his own corruption, he becomes desponding. He fears that the day of complete deliverance from sinning and from sin will never come. Then, springing from this great root of bitterness, many other things arise to produce faintness. Suffering is one of them. For religion does not free from suffering. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous." And often, under his troubles, the believer gets sorely dispirited. His patience gives way; his fortitude fails; he loses heart. Another saddening thing is bereavement. Gideon's heart was sore because of the death of his brothers at Tabor, and many of his fellow-Israelites were similarly distressed. The mourners we have always with us. Another cause of depression is worldly loss. The Israelites suffered much in this way. Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by bread. One other cause of faintness is anxiety about the future. Bunyan's Mr. Fearing has left behind him a very numerous family. But from the causes of faintness turn now to the things by the help of which the faint may continue pursuing. One of these remedies is repentance. Another cure for faintness is faith—a persistent trustful clinging to Christ, and to God in Him. When Gideon grasped the truth which the angel spake to him, that the Lord was with him as his strength, he became like another man. Another remedy is gratitude. God's gracious answer to his request for a succession of signs filled Gideon's heart with devout gratitude, which in turn

was a rich solace to him in his grief. And so, still, if fainting hearts would but meditate more on God's kindnesses to them, they would be mightily strengthened to bear their trials. And here you have another cure for faintness—hope. Not Gideon's faith only, but also his hope springing from it, made him the mighty man of valour that he was. And still God's afflicted ones are saved by hope. Say, "I will hope continually, and will yet praise Thee more and more." And then, having so vowed, act accordingly. "Praise is comely." But more, this your praising of God will give you a still fuller mastery over your faintness. (*William Miller.*) *Faint, yet pursuing*:—Neither in the Bible, nor in any other book, is there a more beautiful motto than this. There could not be a more honourable description, and it is one that is deserved by many warriors in the battle of life. That man hates the profession or business by which he earns his living. He has drifted into it or been forced into it by circumstances, but now he finds that it is uncongenial and unsuited to him. He is the round man in the square hole, and is therefore faint and weary with his life's work, but he deserves the "well done, good and faithful servant," because he does his best. A business is sometimes so laborious and monotonous that it is almost unbearable. That half of the world which does not know how the other half lives can scarcely realise the faintness and weariness of the dim millions who work themselves to death in order to live honestly. Why does that woman, who might earn three pounds a week by a life of sin, make shirts for six shillings? Because, though faint, she has determined by the grace of God to pursue the good and the right way. Some are faint and weary with struggling against inherited disease, or tendencies to evil, but they fight their enemy to the last. Others find that their domestic relations are incompatible with happiness; but they continue to do what is right, and to suffer without murmuring. One of these "meek souls" said to a friend, "You know not the joy of an accepted sorrow." Of life itself many are faint and weary; but they will not leave the post where God has placed them. Of course, when applied to brave men and women like these, the description "Faint, yet pursuing," is a most honourable one; but there are many cases where it would be anything but an expression of praise. Take the case of the selfish man. He has discovered that the result of having no high purpose in life, and of caring for no one but himself, is misery. He is seized with *ennui*, that "awful yawn which sleep cannot dispel," and is generally sick of himself through very selfishness. But though faint and weary, he pursues his course still. Is there on earth a more pitiable sight than that of a man who has grown to hate some sinful indulgence which he continues to pursue merely from force of habit? But we desire to use the motto for our encouragement. None of us are overcoming sin fast enough, but we must never despair. Let us take for our motto, "Faint, yet pursuing." It is only pride that tells us that we are not making the progress we ought to make. And if we do not see results, why then it is braver to continue the struggle when the tide of war is against us than to be only able to fight when shouts of triumph are in our ears. Oh, that it might be said of us in our warfare against evil passions and desires, what was said by a historian of a celebrated Cameronian regiment—"They prayed as they fought, and fought as they prayed; they might be slain, never conquered; they were ready whenever their duty or their religion called them, with undaunted spirit and with great vivacity of mind, to encounter hardships, attempt great enterprises, despise dangers, and bravely rush to death or victory." Many people are faint who would not be if they would only accept the invitation of their heavenly Father, and cast all their anxiety upon Him. The prophet Joel tells the weak to say, "I am strong"; and it was St. Paul's experience that when he was weak then he was strong. Our faintness and weakness, instead of hindering us from pursuing the right way, may help us to do so. There is an old story in Greek annals of a soldier under Antigonus, who had a disease, an extremely painful one, likely to bring him soon to the grave. Always first in the charge was this soldier, rushing into the hottest part of the fray. His pain prompted him to fight, that he might forget it; and he feared not death, because he knew that in any case he had not long to live. Antigonus, who greatly admired the valour of his soldier, discovering his malady, had him cured by one of the most eminent physicians of the day; but from that moment the warrior was absent from the front of the battle. He now sought his ease; for, as he remarked to his companions, he had something worth living for—health, home, and other comforts. Might not our faintness, weakness, and disappointments, like this soldier's disease, stimulate to distinguished service? We must remember that it

is not the strong and the successful, but the weary and the heavy laden, who are especially invited by Christ. (*E. J. Hardy, M.A.*)

Vers. 6–17. **The princes of Succoth . . . The men of Penuel.**—*Patience under provocation*:—Instead of being supported, as they had good right to expect they would have been, by those who profess to be the Lord's people, instances are by no means rare of men of Gideon's stamp being met on their part by scoffs and insinuations, and positive refusals along with cold prudential admonitions to attend to their own business, and allow matters just to take their course. Nor is this all. There are some who go even farther still—men who, while professing to be the friends of truth, are found actually, out of deliberate malice, envy, or jealousy, refusing to lend a lending hand and casting obstacles in the way of accomplishing the reformation on which their generous hearts are set. Now of all this we are furnished with a striking illustration in what is here recorded as having passed between Gideon and the men of Succoth and Penuel. Yet mark how nobly he continued to restrain the impulse of his resentment —an example which naturally reminds us of that of one greater far than Gideon, when He met with treatment similar, yet worse still, at the hands of those whom He had come to seek and to save from a servitude more deplorable by far. Oh, how amazing was His long-suffering forbearance! How analogous also to the conduct of Gideon, while infinitely more worthy of our admiration, was the patient perseverance with which He went on His way, still carrying forward the work which His Father had given Him to do, and for the sake of those very people who thus shamefully requited His love and service and self-denial, exposed Himself to still greater privations and still severer sufferings than any He had yet borne! Oh, if we wonder at the behaviour of the Ephraimites and the men of Succoth and Penuel toward Gideon son of Joash under provocation so aggravated, what ought we to think of Jesus the Son of God in bearing with us as He does! Yet, from what afterwards took place, let us beware how we presume on the long-suffering to which we owe so much. If the promises of Christ are yea and amen, so also are His threatenings; let us never for one moment lose sight of that! Gideon contented himself meanwhile with simply threatening the men of Succoth and Penuel, the former that he would tear their flesh with thorns (ver. 7.), the latter that he would "break down their tower" (ver. 8). But afterwards, when he returned from taking vengeance on his country's enemies at Karkor, thereby crowning his enterprise with complete success, then he fulfilled these threatenings to the very letter. And even so it shall be with all the enemies of Jesus, with all who decline to come to the help of the Lord against the mighty, at that day when He shall "come again, to be admired of all them that love Him," and to "take vengeance" on all besides. Sooner or later the judgment He has threatened shall descend upon them. (*W. W. Duncan, M.A.*) *Punishment of the selfish and mean-spirited*:—These men were blind to the glory of the common cause—selfish, poor-spirited creatures, that shut themselves up in their fenced cities, and were satisfied to let God's soldiers starve, and God's work come to an end for want of support, so long only as they had bread enough to satisfy their own hunger. This was a state of mind not to be corrected by a mere civil speech or explanation. Gideon taught them, not by expostulation, but by the sword and with the briers of the wilderness. Can we say that there are none now who merit the same punishment? none who resist every appeal to assist those who are faint by pursuing God's work? There are still men who have no eye for spiritual importance, but measure all things by their outward appearance and by their relation to their own comfort; men who fortify themselves in their ungenerous selfishness by asking, as these men of Succoth did, "What have you made of this pursuit in which you want us to assist you? what great good have you done, that we should help you? Are Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hands, that we should acknowledge you as useful men, and give you what you ask to help you on in your pursuit?" For such persons, who despise the day of small things, who cannot recognise God if He takes on Him the form of a little child, nor His Church when it exists as a grain of mustard-seed, there remains the doom of seeing the whole work of God in the world finished without their aid, and of hearing the voice of God Himself in rebuke, "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish!" (*Marcus Dods, D.D.*)

Vers. 18–21. **The children of a king.**—*The royal house of Jesus*:—There are family names that stand for wealth, or patriotism, or intelligence. The name of

Washington means patriotism, although some of the blood of that race has become very thin in the last generation. The family of the Medici stood as the representative of letters. The family of the Rothschilds is significant of wealth. The house of Hapsburg in Austria, the house of Stuarts in England, the house of Bourbon in France, were families of imperial authority. But I come to preach of a family more potential, more rich, and more extensive—the royal house of Jesus, of whom the whole family in heaven and on earth is named. 1. First, I speak of our family name. To have conquerors, kings, or princes in the ancestral line gives lustre to the family name. In our line was a King and a Conqueror. Our family name takes lustre from the star that heralded Him, and the spear that pierced Him, and the crown that was given Him. What other family name could ever boast of such an illustrous personage? 2. Next, I speak of the family sorrows. If trouble come to one member of the family, all feel it. So, in the great Christian family, the sorrow of one ought to be the sorrow of all. 3. Next, I notice the family property. After a man of large estate dies, the relations assemble to hear the will read. Our Lord Jesus hath died; and we are assembled to-day to hear the will read. He says: "My peace I give unto you." Through the apostle He says: "All are yours." 4. Next, I speak of the family mansion. Almost every family looks back to a homestead—some country place where you grew up. But all the dwelling-places of dukes and princes and queens are as nothing to the family mansion that is already awaiting our arrival. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *The royal appearance of God's children:*—The people of God resemble the children of a king—I. IN THEIR SPIRITUAL CONFORMITY TO THE IMAGE OF KING JESUS. II. IN THEIR ILLUSTRIOUS TITLES. III. IN THEIR COURTLY APPAREL. IV. IN THEIR ROYAL IMMUNITIES AND PRIVILEGES. 1. They dwell in the royal presence. 2. They have constant access to God. 3. They have royal provision. 4. They have special instruction. 5. They have a kingly guard. 6. They have royal prospects. Learn: 1. The dignity and rights of the saints of God. 2. How full of consolation to believers in sorrow and affliction! (*J. Burns, D.D.*) Jether.—*Jether, the timid son of a brave father:*—The command of Gideon was in harmony with the savage character of that age. We are told by Tacitus concerning a Roman knight, one Civilis—who headed a revolt of the Gauls against Rome—that he acted in a similar but cruel manner, for he gave to his little son some prisoners whom he might use as targets for his little darts and arrows. This was done from revenge and from a desire to initiate the child into the dreadful art of war. Gideon may have desired thus to stimulate his eldest son to hatred of the enemies of his country and boldness in slaying them. Moreover, it was to add dishonour to the death of Zebah and Zalmunna. Jether must have had some boldness and strength, or he could not have followed his father in his last pursuit of the Midianitish kings or have risked the dangers attendant on the campaign; but he shrinks from obeying the command. He was paralysed by fear, not kept back by pity; and hence he stands before us as the type of one who in higher spheres loses advantages which might be gained by the exercise of strength and fearlessness. Nothing more is heard of him in Scripture. He drops out of notice. Life is a battle. Severe are the assaults to be resisted, wearying ofttimes the marches to be undertaken. Fearlessness is, however, essential if we would overcome the Zebahs and Zalmunnas of evil and wrong around. 1. In order to this, then, we must as far as we have opportunity cultivate physical power. There is truth in the phrase "muscular Christianity." To keep a healthy body for the home of the mind should be a persistent aim. We have no right to neglect it. We should be as unwise as would a cottager who, knowing that the rainy season was setting in, should neglect to stop up the gaping hole in the rotting thatch roof. We should strive to develop our powers to the full extent, and when we can go no further, we should conserve the force we have gained. 2. That which we say of the body applies also to the cultivation of mental faculties. The opportunity of strengthening the body may be brief, but that of the mind lifelong. We have but little power at first, but reading, thinking, and mingling with our fellows increases the conscious vigour of intellect. 3. Further, we should be strong in convictions of duty. We should have principles. Our arms should be nerved by moral earnestness. 4. It is well to cultivate a confidence in our powers and principles. Jether was fearful as to his powers, and so he drew not his sword. We should have no hesitancy in doing that which our heavenly Father directs, in our consciences or in His Word, to be undertaken. Yea, we should seek to go beyond others in service. We should arouse ourselves to the putting forth of strength, that by effort we may gain greater strength. We are not urged to put forth effort to attain

knowledge and spiritual power in our own strength. We must "be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." Needless to say, there must be humility, penitence, faith. This conscious spiritual strength and fearlessness are necessary in various circumstances. (1) In the effort to prosper in lawful undertakings, to provide things honest in the sight of all men, and "to provide for our own." The strain on bone and brain at this day is very great. (2) They are necessary in view of some of the contingencies of life. It is useless to be thinking always that something dreadful is about to happen. Fearlessness is a far better spirit in which to meet trial. But it must be a holy fearlessness, because we know that our God cares for us. We need to put aside fear when we stand before that which may cause us a greater anxiety than any circumstances of trial, personal suffering, or even death, the prosperity of Christ's Church and triumph of His truth. We may be concerned, like Eli, for the ark of God. We may hear the roar of the bulls of Bashan—the attacks of infidelity. We may shudder as we see the strongly netted leash of worldliness thrown over the Church. Even then we must not be paralysed by fear, as Jether before Zebah and Zalmunna, for the Spirit of the Lord can lift up a standard against all evil. He can defend His cause. (*Fredk. Hastings.*) As the man is, so is his strength.—*Strength the property of truth*:—Yes: as a man is in character, in faith, in harmony with the will of God, so is his strength; as he is in falseness, injustice, egotism, and ignorance, so is his weakness. And there is but one real perennial kind of strength. The demonstration made by selfish and godless persons, though it shake continents and devastate nations, is not force. It has no nerve, no continuance, but is mere fury, which decays and perishes. Strength is the property of truth, and truth only; it belongs to those who are in union with eternal reality, and to no others in the universe. Would you be invincible? you must move with the eternal powers of righteousness and love. To be showy in appearance or terrible in sound on the wrong side with the futilities of the world is but incipient death. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*) *As the man is, so is his strength*:—I. As a man is PHYSICALLY, so is his strength. If we are to estimate him by his muscular strength, we must take into account his bodily form, his age, his health, his build, his stature. Gideon belonged, as we may say, to the order of nature's nobility. Now, it is perfectly true that we cannot give to ourselves a handsome mien, nor add one cubit to our stature; nevertheless, it is equally true that we can do much to promote our health, to build up our constitution, and even to give dignity to our physical presence. By a regular life, by scrupulous temperance, by due bodily exercise, by habits of order and cleanliness, every one can do not a little in this direction. II. As a man is INTELLECTUALLY, so is his strength. I use the word "strength" here as meaning power of work, capacity for accomplishing the ends of life, and making the world the better for his existence. I suppose that, during the past hundred years, no proverb has been more often quoted, as none has been more largely illustrated, than the pithy aphorism of Lord Bacon, "Knowledge is power." In order to succeed, it is requisite to have intelligence and brains. The commerce of England is not indeed in the hands of learned scholars; but it is, for the most part, in the hands of shrewd, clear-headed, practical men, who understand their business, and know how to push it. Thus intellect becomes an equivalent for strength, and mind means money. In real power of work, the skilled artisan leaves the mere labourer far behind, and the thoughtful clerk the mere mechanical penman; so that as a man is in intelligence so is his strength. III. As a man is MORALLY AND SPIRITUALLY, so is his strength. Character and faith, I will venture to say, more than anything else, determine your power of overcoming difficulty and of accomplishing good. This is the sure gauge of your personal force in society and in the world. A man with a resolute conscience will always be a power. IV. As the man is IN FAITH, so is his strength. Ah! that's the main point of all. What a work that brave soul accomplished all through unshaken confidence in his God! Be that faith yours, young men, and you shall be strong, and shall overcome the wicked one. There is no strength in the world to compare with that which faith imparts, especially the faith which lays hold of a risen and all-sufficient Redeemer. The splendid undertakings of an Alexander, a Hannibal, a Cæsar, are nothing to the achievements which it has accomplished. It has mastered legions of passions, quelled the turbulence of lust, overcome the world, driven the devil to flight, and thrown open an entrance to the palaces of heaven! (*J. T. Davidson, D.D.*)

Vers. 22–35. Rule thou over us . . . for thou hast delivered us.—*Gideon's after-*

life:—Many a man does well in times of difficulty and danger who fails entirely in prosperity. It remains for us to see whether Gideon yielded to this greatest of temptations. Did he now allow selfishness instead of faith and duty to become the ruling principle of his life? That question had to be practically answered at the great assembly that was held on his return. He stood there on the pinnacle of glory. He was at once the Wallace and the Bruce of his native land. And his very modesty in claiming so little for himself made his glory greater. Vanquished by his generosity as much as Penuel and Succoth had been vanquished by his arms, Ephraim probably took the lead in the offer of kingly authority that was made to him. That offer was the climax of his natural glory. His rejection of it was the climax of his moral and spiritual glory. Now, were not the proposal and the reason for it good alike? Gideon had undoubtedly displayed every kingly quality —skill in war, wisdom in council, prudent reserve, patient determination, and superiority to every petty motive and desire. There can be no doubt that had it been right for any man to become king then, he was the very man to fill the place. There can be no doubt that the proposal was in many respects prompted by right feeling, and in some respects a wise one. But the leaders of Israel did not fully understand the wants of their age. Looked at either spiritually or politically, kingly rule would then have been premature. It was needful that God should still manifest His presence at times in direct and striking ways. The nation had not learnt the truth of His continual presence. They had not learnt this truth sufficiently to warrant its being even partially obscured by the intervention of a single human ruler. Neither, considering the question in its lower, its political, aspect, was there yet enough cohesion or common feeling among the tribes to enable them to work permanently together as a united people. Now, I do not say that such reasons for rejecting the offer made to him were distinctly present to the mind of Gideon; but we can see them now, and he was guided aright by the instinctive entering into the mind of God, the instinctive comprehension of the Divine plan, which is one of the choicest gifts that God confers on those who live in close communion with Him. The very fault of Israel in not recognising the hand of God, and in offering the crown on that account to Gideon, was made the occasion of setting emphatically before them the very truth they needed—the occasion of gathering up for them the spiritual meaning of the whole of this portion of their history. Thus, by his faithfulness and self-denial, Gideon became the means of bringing spiritual benefits to his people as real and more enduring than the political and social ones that his sword had won. And so the time came at last when God's immediate presence got to be recognised in some such real though confused, imperfect way as truths do get recognised among men. The time arrived for Jehovah retiring, so to speak, somewhat into the background when He appointed David, the man after His own heart, to take His place visibly. And this brings us to the point at which Gideon is no longer a guiding light, but a beacon to warn us of our danger. Very rightly had he read in all that had occurred the lesson that it was Jehovah, and in the meantime Jehovah only and immediately, that must govern Israel. Very nobly had he refused power in which he would have delighted, in order that he might get this lesson impressed upon his people. But at this point he grew impatient at the people's dulness, and at the slowness of the evolution of the scheme of Providence. He had done much to make Israel feel the nearness of the God whom he trusted in and loved so fervently. Might he not now take a further and more influential step? Might not means be devised by which this wonderful deliverance could be effectually commemorated, and coming generations be made really to feel that it was Jehovah alone that had delivered or that could deliver? Thus he would help on God's plan by his own shrewd contrivance. With this object he took advantage of the enthusiasm that prevailed—an enthusiasm of admiration for himself that was only heightened by his refusal of the crown, unwelcome though that refusal was. He asked for a certain portion of the spoil, and it was placed at once at his disposal. With this he made an ephod and placed it in his own city, Ophrah. In all this Gideon greatly erred. His natural fondness for devices and his skill in shrewd contrivance, kept in check till now, and made useful by his living faith and strict obedience, had led him at last astray. Forming plans of his own without being in direct communion with the God who had guided him till now, he failed to meet the wants of his time; nay, he pandered to its most dangerous vices. That happened here which happens so continually in the Church's tangled story. Excessive reverence for the past was made a substitute for walking with the personal God in the living present. It is sad that one who had believed

so steadfastly, one who had served so well and done so much, should thus, through impatience and self-will, have stumbled at the end. Yet even this bears its lesson with it—the lesson that even in the noblest of God's servants we cannot find a perfect model; that in communion with the present Spirit we must learn for ourselves to judge concerning what is to be admired and what to be only shunned in the very best and greatest of mankind. One perfect example there is, but only one: He who is man, but also more than man, and who is our pattern most of all in this—that, Son of God and head of humanity as He was, He yet did in each particular, not His own will, but the will of the Father that had sent Him. (*W. Miller, M.A.*) *Gideon, the deliverer:*—I. GIDEON TEACHES US THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING OUR FAITH STRENGTHENED. Any means Gideon possessed for accomplishing the work he had undertaken were, humanly speaking, altogether inadequate. He had not a chance of success, if it could be said with truth, "There is no hope for him in God." Faith being then, as faith is still, the medium of connection between human weakness and Divine power, it was his mainstay. He was thrown entirely on its strength. The ship does not ride the storm otherwise than by the hold her anchor takes of the solid ground. By that, which lies in the calm depths below, as little moved by the waters that swell and roll and foam above, as by the winds that lash them into fury, she resists the gale, and rides the billows of the stormiest sea. But her safety depends on something else also. When masts are struck and sails are furled, and, anchored off reef or rocky shore, she is labouring in the wild tumult for her life, it likewise lies in the strength of her cable and of the iron arms that grasp the solid ground. By these she hangs to it; and thus not only the firm earth, but their strength also, is her security. Let the flukes of the anchor or strands of the cable snap, and her fate is sealed. Nothing can avert it. Powerless to resist, and swept forward by the sea, she drives on ruin; and hurled against an iron shore, her timbers are crushed to pieces like a shell. And what anchor and cable are to her, faith, by which man makes God's strength his own, was to Gideon, and is still to believers in their times of trial. II. GIDEON TEACHES US TO MAKE THOROUGH WORK OF WHAT BELONGS TO OUR DELIVERANCE FROM SIN. In closing the account of what God did for him, and through him for his people, the historian says, "Thus was Midian subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted up their heads no more." And how was this accomplished? The remarkable victory God wrought for Gideon, without any effort on his part, may be regarded as a type of that greater, better victory which, without any effort on ours, God's Son wrought for us when He took our nature and our sins upon Him—dying, the just for the unjust, that we might be saved. Gideon followed up this victory by calling all possible resources to his aid. He summoned the whole country to arms, as, accompanied by his famous three hundred men, he hung on the skirts of the broken host, and with sword bathed in their blood cut down the fugitives—kings, princes, captains, and common soldiers—with an eye that knew no pity and a hand that did not spare. Now, it is to work as thorough, and against enemies more formidable, that He who trod the winepress alone, redeeming us to God by His blood, calls all His followers. By resolute self-denial, by constant watchfulness, by earnest prayer, by the diligent use of every means of grace, and above all by the help of the Holy Spirit, we are to labour to cast sin out of our hearts. This is no easy work. But heaven is not to be reached by easy-going people. Like a beleaguered city, where men scale the walls and swarm in at the deadly breach, the violent take it by force. The rest it offers is for the weary. The crowns it confers are for warriors' brows. (*T. Guthrie, D.D.*) *Gideon at his best:*—A man is at his best when he overcomes a great temptation, when he shows the might of a regal spirit, and conquers himself. Gideon now reaches the climax of goodness, which is true greatness. I. Kingship OFFERED to him. Here is—1. An appeal to the love of power. Men love power. What disaster ambition has produced! The evils of war. The tricks of diplomatists. Prostitution of talents. Sacrifice of principle. 2. An appeal to paternal affection. Positions for some, if not all, of Gideon's sons. The first of a kingly race. The founder of a royal family. An opportunity seldom presented. A rare opening. 3. An appeal to the desire of posthumous fame. To live after death a widespread and all but universal desire. One indication of our immortality. The opportunity now presented to Gideon to satisfy desire in a tangible form. His name inscribed in the roll of Israel's kings. Who is the man to refuse? Gideon. II. Kingship REJECTED by him. 1. Gideon's self-denial. 2. Gideon's patriotism. Shown as much sometimes by what a man refuses to do as by what he undertakes. 3. Gideon's loyalty to conscience. The voice of the people

not always the voice of God. But the voice of conscience directed by the Bible and enlightened by the Holy Spirit is the voice of God. Listen to that voice. III. Kingship ACKNOWLEDGED by him. 1. Fidelity to God. 2. Reproof of the people. You have the theocratic form of government. The best form. Why seek to subvert the Divine arrangement? 3. A true regard for the people's welfare. The people do not always know what is for the best. Here learn that a man may do his best and seemingly fail. Gideon before his age. (*Wm. Burrows, B.A.*) *Kingship offered and refused*:—The nation needed a settled government, a centre of authority which would bind the tribes together, and the Abi-ezrite chief was now clearly marked as a man fit for royalty. He was able to persuade as well as to fight; he was bold, firm, and prudent. But to the request that he should become king and found a dynasty Gideon gave an absolute refusal. We always admire a man who refuses one of the great posts of human authority or distinction. The throne of Israel was even at that time a flattering offer. But should it have been made? There are few who will pause in a moment of high personal success to think of the point of morality involved; yet we may credit Gideon with the belief that it was not for him or any man to be called king in Israel. As a judge he had partly proved himself; as a judge he had a Divine call and a marvellous indication: that name he would accept, not the other. One of the chief elements of Gideon's character was a strong but not very spiritual religiousness. He attributed his success entirely to God, and God alone he desired the nation to acknowledge as its Head. He would not even in appearance stand between the people and their Divine Sovereign, nor with his will should any son of his take a place so unlawful and dangerous. Along with his devotion to God it is quite likely that the caution of Gideon had much to do with his resolve. Before Gideon could establish himself in a royal seat he would have to fight a great coalition in the centre and south and also beyond Jordan. To the pains of oppression would succeed the agony of civil war. Unwilling to kindle a fire which might burn for years and perhaps consume himself, he refused to look at the proposal, flattering and honourable as it was. But there was another reason for his decision which may have had even more weight. Like many men who have distinguished themselves in one way, his real ambition lay in a different direction. We think of him as a military genius. He for his part looked to the priestly office and the transmission of Divine oracles as his proper calling. He desired to cultivate that intercourse with Heaven which more than anything else gave him the sense of dignity and strength. From the offer of a crown he turned as if eager to don the robe of a priest and listen for the holy oracles that none beside himself seemed able to receive. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*) *Gideon's unambitious spirit*:—1 Gideon's piety. The Israelites offered Gideon the rule over them. Few men would have refused so tempting an offer. But Gideon knew that he could not accept it without trenching upon God's prerogative. In the spiritual application, our wisdom is to make request to the Lord Jesus, "Rule Thou over us, for Thou hast delivered us." He hath "saved us" at the cost of His own life-blood, "from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us." 2. Gideon's modesty. What he had sought in his service against Midian was not his own aggrandisement, but Israel's welfare (1 Cor. ix. 18, 23; 2 Cor. xii. 14, 15). Ambition and self-seeking mar the service of God, and injure the minister's own soul. The service itself is its own highest honour and best reward. 3. Gideon's wisdom, too, appears in his choosing to remain in the station to which the providence of God had called him. Restlessness can never bring happiness. The adage is true, He who carves for himself often cuts his fingers; he who leaves God to carve for him shall never have an empty plate. "Seekest thou great things for thyself, seek them not" (Jer. xlv. 5). (*A. R. Fausset, M.A.*)

Vers. 24–27. **Gideon made an ephod.**—*Gideon, the ecclesiastic*:—A strong but not spiritual religiousness is the chief note of Gideon's character. It may be objected that such an one, if he seeks ecclesiastical office, does so unworthily; but to say so is an uncharitable error. It is not the devout temper alone that finds attraction in the ministry of sacred things; nor should a love of place and power be named as the only other leading motive. One who is not devout may in all sincerity covet the honour of standing for God before the congregation, leading the people in worship and interpreting the sacred oracles. A vulgar explanation of human desire is often a false one; it is so here. The ecclesiastic may show few tokens of the spiritual temper, the other-worldliness, the glowing and simple truth we rightly account to be the proper marks of a Christian ministry; yet he may by his own

reckoning have obeyed a clear call. His function in this case is to maintain order and administer outward rites with dignity and care—a limited range of duty indeed, but not without utility, especially when there are inferior and less conscientious men in office not far away. He does not advance faith, but according to his power he maintains it. But the ecclesiastic must have the ephod. The man who feels the dignity of religion more than its humane simplicity, realising it as a great movement of absorbing interest, will naturally have regard to the means of increasing dignity and making the movement impressive. When it is supposed that Gideon fell away from his first faith in making this image the error lies in over-estimating his spirituality at the earlier stage. We must not think that at any time the use of a symbolic image would have seemed wrong to him. He acted at Ophrah as priest of the true God. And yet, pure, and for the time even elevated, in the motive, Gideon's attempt at priestcraft led to his fall. "The thing became a snare to Gideon and his house," perhaps in the way of bringing in riches and creating the desire for more. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*) *Ruler or priest:*—Underlying Gideon's desire to fill the office of priest there was a dull perception of the highest function of one man in relation to others. It appears to the common mind a great thing to rule, to direct secular affairs, to have the command of armies and the power of filling offices and conferring dignities; and no doubt to one who desires to serve his generation well, royalty, political power, even municipal office, offer many excellent opportunities. But set kingship on this side, kingship concerned with the temporal and earthly, or at best humane aspects of life, and on the other side priesthood of the true kind which has to do with the spiritual, by which God is revealed to man and the holy ardour and Divine aspirations of the human will are sustained, and there can be no question which is the more important. A clever, strong man may be a ruler. It needs a good man, a pious man, a man of heavenly power and insight, to be in any right sense a priest—one who really stands between God and men, bearing the sorrows of his kind, their trials, doubts, cries and prayers, on his heart, and presenting them to God, interpreting to the weary and sad and troubled the messages of heaven. (*Ibid.*) *A mock ephod:*—In Paul's words, Gideon did not know what sin was. He knew suffering in plenty; but, shallow old soldier as he was, he did not know the secret of all suffering. Gideon was as ignorant as the mass of men are what God's law really is, what sin really is, and what the only cure of sin really is. At bottom that was Gideon's fall. And accordingly Gideon made a mock ephod at Ophra, while all the time God had made a true and sure ephod both for Himself and for Gideon and for all Israel at Shiloh. And God's ephod had an altar connected with it, and a sacrifice for sin, and the blood of sprinkling, and the pardon of sin, and a clean heart, and a new life; all of which Israel so much needed, but all of which Gideon, with all his high services, knew nothing about. Sin was the cause of all the evil that Gideon in his bravery had all his life been battling with; but, instead of going himself, and taking his Ironsides and all his people up with him to God's house against sin, Gideon set up a sham house of God of his own, and a sham service of God of his own, with the result to himself and to Israel that the sacred writer puts in such plain words. Think of Gideon, of all men in Israel, leading all Israel a-whoring away from God! The pleasure-loving people came up to Gideon's pleasure-giving ephod, when both he and they should have gone to God's penitential ephod. They forgot all about the Midianites as they came up to Ophra to eat and to drink and to dance. When, had they been well and wisely led, they would have gone to Shiloh with the Midianites "ever before them," till the God of Israel would have kept the Midianites and all their other enemies for ever away from them. Gideon was a splendid soldier, but he was a very short-sighted priest. He put on a costly ephod indeed, but it takes a great deal more than a costly ephod to make a prevailing priest. I see, and you must see, men every day who are as brave and as bold as Gideon, and as full of anger and revenge against all the wrongs and all the miseries of their fellow-men; men and women who take their lives in their hands to do battle with ignorance and vice and all the other evils that the land lies under; and, all the time, they go on repeating Gideon's fatal mistake; till, at the end of their life they leave all these wrongs and miseries very much as they found them: nothing better, but rather worse. And all because they set up an ephod of their own devising in the place of the ephod and the altar and the sacrifice and the intercession that God has set up for these and all other evils. They say, and in their goodness of heart they do far more than merely say—what shall the poor eat, and what shall they drink, and how shall they be housed? At great cost to them-

selves they put better houses for the working classes, and places of refreshment and amusement, and reading-rooms, and libraries, and baths, and open spaces, and secular schools and "moderate" churches in the room of the Cross and the Church and the gospel of Jesus Christ; and they complain that the Midianites do not remove but come back faster than they can chase them out. Either the Cross of Christ was an excess and a superfluity, or your expensive but maladroit nostrums for sin are an insult to Him and to His Cross. (*A. Whyte, D.D.*) *Gideon's great error*:—1. Gideon's sin injurious to himself. Scripture, unlike mere human biographies, tells faithfully the failings of its heroes. The record of the believer's blemishes is as edifying as that of his graces. Good intentions are no excuse for self-willed inventions. An oracle of Gideon's own contrivance, and made out of the golden amulets of idolaters, could never be pleasing to God, and was a bad return to make for the Divine favour in granting him victory. It "became a snare unto Gideon" himself, by lessening his zeal for the house of God in Shiloh. Still more so to his family. 2. Gideon's sin had a deadly effect on the nation. One false step of a good man leads multitudes astray. If Gideon could have risen from the grave and seen the consequences of his one grand error, how he would have grieved! (*A. R. Fausset, M.A.*)

Vers. 29–35. **And Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and dwelt in his own house.**—*Gideon at his worst*:—Man is a strange mixture of greatness and of littleness, of goodness, and of badness. The one lies very close to the other. I. Gideon at his worst MORALLY. Biblical saints are not made more than human. Their virtues are described that we may imitate them, their vices depicted that we may avoid them. Gideon not without his failings: many wives, and even concubines. Remember the degenerate times in which he lived. No man altogether superior to the influences of his age; Gideon not. His guilt not so great as if he had lived in our days. Polygamy now almost an impossible crime. Be thankful for what the gospel has done for modern society. In those days, too, a man became a ruler, and was permitted to do things not allowed to the private individual. Great positions have always great moral dangers. In lonely walks of life there is favourable opportunity for the growth of the white flower of a blameless character. Zeal for the Lord of hosts may go along with imperfection. Zeal will not condone for the imperfection. II. Gideon at his worst PHYSICALLY. Gideon lived to a good old age; still he died, and was buried in the sepulchre of Joash. He who overcame vast multitudes is now overcome of death. Mighty Gideon lies powerless in the sepulchre of Joash. Thousands passing away daily, and yet the living regard not the common fate. Oh, that men would consider their latter end! To live in view of death is not to die the sooner, is not to live less nobly or usefully. III. Gideon at his worst INFLUENTIALLY. Not always true that the good which a man does is buried along with his bones. A good man's influence must abide more or less. A man's greatness shows that he can project an influence that shall outlast his earthly life. Yet how often we appear to see the efforts made by a good man in life blighted at his death. As soon as Gideon was dead, the children of Israel turned again, and went a-whoring after Baalim, and made Baal-berith their god. Pathetic the statement, short-lived Gideon's influence. The people restrained by Gideon's presence, but not converted by his example. Superficial changes not lasting. Rulers may do much, but the gospel only can work a permanent reformation. (*Wm. Burrows, B.A.*) **The children of Israel remembered not.**—*The origin, nature, and baseness of ingratitude*:—I. WHAT GRATITUDE IS, AND UPON WHAT THE OBLIGATION TO IT IS GROUNDED. This virtue includes—1. A particular observation, or taking notice of a kindness received, and consequently of the goodwill and affection of the person who did that kindness. For still, in this case, the mind of the giver is more to be attended to than the matter of the gift; it being this that stamps it properly a favour and gives it the noble and endearing denomination of a kindness. 2. That which brings it from the heart into the mouth, and makes a man express the sense he has of the benefit done him by thanks, acknowledgments, and gratulations; and where the heart is full of the one, it will certainly overflow and run over in the other. 3. An endeavour to recompense our benefactor, and to do something that may redound to his advantage, in consideration of what he has done towards ours. II. THE NATURE AND BASENESS OF INGRATITUDE. There is not any one vice or ill quality incident to the mind of man, against which the world has raised such a loud and universal outcry, as against ingratitude. It is properly an insensibility of kindnesses received, without any endeavour either to acknowledge or repay them. To repay them,

indeed, by a return equivalent, is not in every one's power, and consequently cannot be his duty; but thanks are a tribute payable by the poorest. For surely nature gives no man a mouth to be always eating, and never saying grace; nor a hand only to grasp and to receive: but as it is furnished with teeth for the one, so it should have a tongue also for the other: and the hands that are so often reached out to take and to accept, should be sometimes lifted up also to bless. The world is maintained by intercourse; and the whole course of nature is a great exchange, in which one good turn is and ought to be the stated price of another. III. THE PRINCIPLE FROM WHICH IT PROCEEDS. In one word, it proceeds from that which we call ill-nature. 1. A proneness to do ill turns, attended with a complacency, or secret joy of mind, upon the sight of any mischief that befalls another. 2. An utter insensibility of any good or kindness done him by others. IV. THOSE ILL QUALITIES THAT INSEPARABLY ATTEND INGRATITUDE, AND ARE NEVER DISJOINED FROM IT. 1. Pride. The original ground of our obligation to gratitude is that each man has but a limited right to the good things of the world, and that the natural and allowed way by which one is to obtain possession of these things is by his own industrious acquisition of them. Consequently, when any good is dealt to him any other way than by his own labour, he is accountable to the person who dealt it to him, as for a thing to which he had no right or claim by any action of his own. But pride shuts a man's eyes against all this, and so fills him with an opinion of his own transcendent worth, that he imagines himself to have a right to all things, as well those that are the effects and fruits of other men's labours as of his own. So that if any advantage accrues to him by the liberality of his neighbour, he does not look upon it as a free and undeserved gift, but rather as a just homage to that worth and merit which he conceives to be in himself, and to which all the world ought to become tributary. 2. Hard-heartedness, or want of compassion. It was ingratitude that put the poniard into the hand of Brutus, but it was want of compassion which thrust it into Cæsar's heart. V. SOME USEFUL CONSEQUENCES, BY WAY OF APPLICATION, FROM THE PREMISES. 1. Never enter into a league of friendship with an ungrateful person: that is, plant not thy friendship upon a dunghill; it is too noble a plant for so base a soil. 2. As a man tolerably discreet ought by no means to attempt the making of such an one his friend, so neither is he, in the next place, to presume to think that he shall be able so much as to alter or ameliorate the humour of an ungrateful person by any acts of kindness, though never so frequent, never so obliging. Flints may be melted, but an ungrateful heart cannot; no, not by the strongest and the noblest flame. I limit not the operation of God's grace; but, humanly speaking, it seldom fails but that an ill principle has its course, and nature makes good its blow. 3. Wheresoever you see a man notoriously ungrateful, you may rest assured that there is in him no true sense of religion. (*R. South, D.D.*)

CHAPTER IX.

VERS. 1–22. **Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal.**—*The election of the usurper to be king:*—I. CONTRASTS IN THE HISTORY OF GOD'S OWN PEOPLE. After Gideon—Abimelech! II. THE BEST OF FATHERS MAY HAVE THE WORST OF SONS. III. USEFUL PURPOSES ARE SERVED IN RECORDING A WICKED MAN'S LIFE IN THE BOOK OF GOD. 1. The record is given as a curse, and not as a blessing. 2. Such a record illustrates the truth of God's testimony respecting human character. 3. It shows by practical example the frightfully evil nature of sin when allowed to develop itself unchecked. 4. Wicked deeds recorded are beacons set up to warn us from the rocks and whirlpools of sin. IV. GOD CAN BRING ACCUSERS AGAINST THE WICKED WHEN THEY FANCY THEMSELVES MOST SECURE. (*J. P. Millar.*) *Abimelech, the adventurer:*—Abimelech is the Oriental adventurer, and uses the methods of another age than ours; yet we have our examples, and if they are less scandalous in some ways, if they are apart from bloodshed and savagery, they are still sufficiently trying to those who cherish the faith of Divine justice and providence. How many have to see ith amazement the adventurer triumph by means of seventy pieces of silver from the house of Baal or even from a holier treasury. He in a selfish and cruel game seems to have speedy and complete success denied to the best and purest cause. Fighting for his own hand in wicked or contemptuous

hardness and arrogant conceit, he finds support, applause, an open way. Being no prophet, he has honour in his own town. He knows the art of the stealthy insinuation, the lying promise, and the flattering murmur; he has skill to make the favour of one leading person a step to securing another. When a few important people have been hoodwinked, he too becomes important, and "success" is assured. The Bible, most entirely honest of books, frankly sets before us this adventurer, Abimelech, in the midst of the judges of Israel, as low a specimen of "success" as need be looked for; and we trace the well-known means by which such a person is promoted. "His mother's brethren spake of him," &c. That there was little to say, that he was a man of no character, mattered not the least. The thing was to create an impression, so that Abimelech's scheme might be introduced and forced. So far he could intrigue and then, the first steps gained, he could mount. But there was in him none of the mental power that afterwards marked Jehu, none of the charm that survives with the name of Absalom. It was a jealousy, pride, ambition, he played, as the most jealous, proud, and ambitious; yet for three years the Hebrews of the league, blinded by the desire to have their nation like others, suffered him to bear the name of king. And by this sovereignty the Israelites who acknowledged it were doubly and trebly compromised. Not only did they accept a man without a record, they believed in one who was an enemy to his country's religion—one, therefore, quite ready to trample upon its liberty. This is really the beginning of a worse oppression than that of Jabin or of Midian. It shows on the part of Hebrews generally, as well as those who tamely submitted to Abimelech's lordship, a most abject state of mind. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*) *Ambition destroys the finer feelings of men*:—The love of power and supremacy absorbed, consumed Napoleon. Before this duty, honour, love, humanity, fell prostrate. Josephine, we are told, was dear to him; but the devoted wife, who had stood firm and faithful in the day of his doubtful fortunes, was cast off in his prosperity to make room for a stranger, who might be more subservient to his power. He was affectionate, we are told, to his brothers and mother; but his brothers, the moment they ceased to be his tools, were disgraced; and his mother, it is said, was not allowed to sit in the presence of her imperial son. He sometimes softened, we are told, by the sight of the field of battle strewn with the wounded and dead. But if the Moloch of his ambition claimed new heaps of slain to-morrow it was never denied. With all his sensibility he gave millions to the sword with as little compunction as he would have brushed away so many insects which had infested his march. (*H. E. Channing.*) **The trees went forth . . . to anoint a king.**—*The parable of the trees*:—This Divine parable is full of interest. It is the oldest complete example of a parable blending with literal history. It was spoken by Jotham, the youngest son of Gideon, to expose the unworthy conduct of the Israelites, and to arrest them in their course. The olive, the vine, and the fig-tree, in the metaphorical application, would be his father, his brethren, and himself, none of whom would be king. The bramble would be Abimelech, who would either reign or destroy, and who would in the end, as the parable teaches, introduce so wretched a system as to entail upon himself and people mutual destruction. And so it happened. And such is the eternal law. He whose throne is reached through falsehood and blood, who has no foundation of virtue and right and worth to rest upon, must continue to cement with fresh crime the edifice he has reared, and so to add to the fire of vengeance that is secretly gathering around him, until at length some additional blow breaks the cover under which it has been smouldering, and it bursts upon the wicked tyrant and destroys, as it was with this Abimelech, both reign and life. Such is the lesson yielded by this parable in its letter, as a warning against that destructive ambition which has so often desolated the earth, in ancient and in modern times. Before quitting this part of the subject, allow me to call your attention to the difference between metaphor and correspondence. Metaphor is a certain likeness which is perceived by the mind, between two natural things, which have in other respects no connection with one another. Correspondence is the analogy which exists between two things, one spiritual and the other natural, and which answer to one another in all their uses and in all respects. We might go further, and attempt to show that in all cases of true and complete correspondences the spiritual is to the natural as the cause to the effect, the soul to the body; but upon this we cannot now enlarge. We have dwelt upon the parable as a metaphor. The olive-tree stands in this respect for Gideon. Like him, it was most valuable and honoured, and like him it would not reign. In other respects there was

no connection or relation between them, and both were natural visible objects. We come now to the spiritual sense of the parable, and to bring this out we must employ, not metaphor, but correspondence. Perceptions, or acknowledged principles of truth or error, grow up in the mind like trees in the soil, and answer to trees in all their progress. Instruction is like seed. Instruction in Divine things is the seed of all that is great and good in the soul. "The seed," the Divine Saviour said, "is the Word of God" (Luke viii. 11). If we watch the reception and growth of knowledge in the mind, until it becomes a clear and enlarged view, and at length a productive principle, we shall discern the closest analogy to the progression of a tree from seed to fruit. In our text, however, we have not only the subject of trees in general placed before us, but three trees especially are singled out as valuable, but declining to reign—the olive, the fig-tree, and the vine: and one as worthless determined to rule or to destroy—the bramble. Let us examine these singly; and first, the olive. It is the tree most esteemed in Eastern countries, and especially in Palestine. Its wood yields a precious gum, its fruits are delightful and nutritious, and its oil, which is as it were the essence of the fruit pressed out, is used in food, also to give light, and as holy oil in the offerings of worship. As trees correspond to truths perceived as principles in the mind, the most worthy tree will correspond to the most valuable principle, that is, the wisdom which teaches love to the Lord. This principle when it has grown up in the soul, and given us to know the true character of our heavenly Father, shows us that He is not only loving, but love itself, infinite love unutterably tender, unchangeably merciful, good to all, whose tender mercies are over all His works. This is the celestial olive-tree which yields the oil, honoured both by God and man. It is of the olive-tree corresponding to the interior wisdom which conjoins the soul and its God together, and through which holy love descends, that we are informed in our text it refused to be king over the trees. The Divine Word teaches us by this that the spirit of rule is opposed to the spirit of love. Love desires to aid, to serve, to bless, but not to rule. If placed in positions of government and responsibility, it accepts them that it may minister, not that it may reign. If it were to enter into the desire of ruling it would lose its fatness; or, in other words, its richness and its joy. The fig-tree is next brought under notice. It was one of the most common fruit trees in Palestine, growing often on the wayside. It corresponds therefore to that natural perception which teaches the ordinary virtues of daily life. But even the common virtues of life, to be genuine, must be separated from the love of dominion. It is not always so. But unless this is really the case, there is no sweetness in doing good. Our good in fact is not good, but self in a disguise. A person will sometimes be liberal in his support of charities. He will profess the utmost sympathy for the poor. He will be generous in his support of public institutions for education and general improvement. His fig-tree seems to bear fine fruit, and yet it is quite possible that the love of applause, the desire to be paid by the suffrages of his fellow-citizens, being given to confer upon him political power, may be his aim. And if so, his figs have no sweetness, and are not good fruit. And oh, what is the applause of men compared with the sweetness of heaven? What are fruits worth if they are only gilded dust? (Jer. xxiv. 8). Such, then, is the lesson conveyed in the reply of the fig-tree spiritually understood. Should we leave the sweetness of heavenly virtue, and the real goodness of works which will abide the scrutiny of eternity, for the empty pageantry of place and power, sought only from the love of rule, and entailing bitterness here, and misery hereafter? "Then said the trees unto the vine, Come thou and reign over us." Vines correspond to the truths of faith. The Church, especially as to its principles of faith, is commonly called in the Scriptures a vineyard. The reason is, no doubt, that the influence of principles of true faith is to the mind what wine is to the body—it strengthens the exhausted and cheers the weary. There are more that be with us than all that be against us: why then should we faint or despair? A God of love has created and prepared us for our work. His creation consists of innumerable channels, through which His benevolence descends. Loving friends are around, and a heaven of love before us. All things cheer us on. The mountains run down with new wine. The vine, in our text, speaks of its wine as cheering God and man. And when we perceive that wine is the emblem of encouraging truth, we appreciate the force of the Divine words. For when man is cheered by truth and saved, God rejoices with him. But the vine intimates that, if she sought to be ruler over the trees, she would leave her wine. "Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be

promoted over the trees?" And so it is. If any one, by means of heavenly truth seeks dominion, his truth ceases to be saving. It is poison, not wine, to him. We come now, however, to a plant of very different character, and you will find the reply quite different. "Then said all the trees to the bramble, Come thou, and reign over us." The reply takes it for granted that he is willing, and expresses his determination either to rule or destroy. This bramble is a low bushy tree with strong thorns, and whose wood is of a fiery nature easily set in flames. It is the emblem of the lust of dominion, which is also essentially unbelieving. The ambitious man believes in nothing but himself and his cunning. Everything which will contribute to his earthly aggrandisement is welcome; but he hates what will not come down to his level. Let us hear him. "If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow: and, if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon." What an extraordinary invitation was that! The olive, the vine, the fig-tree, the lofty cedar, and all the noble trees of the forest, were to come and put themselves under the shadow of this contemptible shrub! How ridiculous an idea! Yet it is paralleled, in all respects, by the demands of ambition. It will deign to lend its protection to Divine things, only they must be subservient, and it must be chief. This principle in politicians makes religion an instrument of state policy; the ministers of religion a superior kind of police. But woe to the religion which stoops to it. It loses its own native life and vigour: it leaves its oil, and its figs, and its wine. The principle in an ambitious priest uses all the semblances of earnest piety to attain his selfish ends. He cares, however, nothing for them in themselves. That which he cannot bend to his selfish rule he burns to destroy. He says, like this miserable plant, "If not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon." He burns with the mad rage of frenzy against whatever will not stoop to gratify his insane whim to rule over all things. From the whole of this Divine lesson we may gather the most invaluable impressions. We cannot too strongly imbue ourselves with the conviction that all heaven breathes humility, and everything heavenly is humble. The moment any sacred principle is turned to a selfish purpose, it loses its richness, its sweetness, its holiness, and worth. Love becomes flattery, virtue hypocrisy, faith deception. Oh let us shun this awful, desolating, soul-destroying sin. And, on the contrary, let us attend to Him who is at once the humblest and the highest. Bring often to mind the impressive and beautiful scene, when, surrounded by His disciples, He took a little child, and placed it in the midst of them. It was the day following that of the grand scene of the Transfiguration. (*J. Bayley, Ph.D.*) *The parable of Jotham*:—I. ITS INTENTION AND SUCCESS. When William Penn was carrying on negotiations with the Indians he used to gain their respect and attention by exhibiting to them his skill as a swordsman. This was an acquirement which the red man could appreciate. So Jotham here clothes the truths he wishes to utter in the form of parable, and gains the attention of the men of Shechem by his skilful use of imagery. II. THE CONTENTS OF THE PARABLE. In it we have the national life of Israel set forth under the similitude of the natural life of the tree. In the kingdom of trees we notice— 1. The individuality of each tree. 2. The diversities of size, and form, and worth, found among them. 3. The manifest dependence of some trees upon others. III. THE TEACHING WHICH UNDERLIES IT. The parable implies that there were men in Israel at this time who possessed the qualifications necessary to a good ruler set forth in the excellences peculiar to the trees mentioned. But these men, the most fitted to rule, refused to do so because there is no honour in ruling where excellence is held in dishonour. They were in the soil of private life, which was congenial to their nature, and to be transplanted to a soil in which only a bramble could flourish, would be to lose their power of imparting light and sweetness. The nation, the city, or the congregation in which a bramble is held in estimation is not the soil in which to plant an olive-tree, a vine, or a fig-tree. Lessons: 1. The honour of a leader depends, not upon the fact that he is chosen to rule, but upon who chooses him. 2. It is the man who gives honour to the position, and not the position which gives honour to the man. 3. In choosing a position in the world, we should be most solicitous to obtain that which will be favourable to the development of our character, and that in which character will be appreciated. 4. The ruler of a nation is a mirror in which is reflected the character of the people. 5. The true leaders of men have resources within for themselves, and therefore for others. Such men can afford to remain in obscurity, their mind is to them a kingdom, they are their own society. (*A London Minister.*) *The parable of the*

trees (to Young Men):—This parable of Jotham is, it is supposed, the very oldest in existence. We reach here, in a literary sense, almost to the source of fictitious writing. It is a question sometimes put to religious teachers, "Do you object to works of fiction?" For myself I can answer at once. "I do not." If I did I should condemn perhaps all the peoples that ever lived, simple and cultured alike. In the snow hut of the Laplanders, in the warm wooden house of the Norse peasant, in the sunny islands of the Southern Sea, and all through the burning East, genius has in this way expressed itself, and men have been pleased and improved by its ministries. But question me further. Ask me if I object to much of the sensational literature of the day, and I answer, "I do"; not because it is fictitious, but because of the evil in more or less degree which it contains, and because it is sorry nourishment for human minds or hearts. To return to Jotham's parable. "The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them." There must have been a good deal of talk among them before it came to that, much wagging of arboreous tongues, twittering of leaf, and groaning of branch. They did not need a king. But the procession has started. We must follow and make part of it, if we want to see and hear. I. Now there is a halt before an OLIVE-TREE. And they said to the olive-tree, "Reign thou over us." A splendid offer, to be the anointed king over the whole vegetable world! We listen to hear the reply, couched in the deprecating, cautious phraseology usual in such cases. No such answer is given; but a clear, distinct refusal of the proffered honour. "Should I leave my fatness?" &c. Must I tear up my roots from the kindly soil where I have had my home for a thousand years, and cease to receive the secret but willing ministries of the earth, and close up the channels along which they have come? Must I shake the hard grain of my body by locomotion, and have my leaves withered in a triumphal progress, and see my berries grow scant and shrivelled, and produce no more oil for God or man, and all this that I may be a king? Wise olive-tree! Keep thy roots where they have struck and spread! Build up in concentric rings, as the years come and go, the hard pile of the serviceable wood! Store the secret fragrance! Distil the precious oil for many uses! Give men the annual harvest and God the continual glory of thy growing! Can we miss the lesson? Usefulness is better than honour. Usefulness, if it be of the higher kind, is attained through long growing and long striving. But when it is attained, when there is a normal, regulated usefulness flowing steadily out of a man's life, when he serves God and man where he is and by what he is, the offer of promotion ought to carry with it some very strong and clear enforcements to induce him to think of acceptance. II. Here is a FIG-TREE by the wayside. It belongs to an old and most respectable family. It traces its pedigree up to Eden. It leads a useful life, and yet it has much less to give up and leave than the olive. But no! The fig-tree has not much, but it has something substantial and good. It has beautiful leaves of deep shining green, and better still—for the fig-tree makes no mention of its leaves—it has figs which carry in them a wonderful sweetness when they are fully ripe. Sweetness is the one quality which the fig-tree felt that it possessed. There is in some human souls a sweetness which imparts a fig-tree flavour to the whole life. When you meet one who possesses this gift moving about among rough ways and persons, consider that you see something far more than merely pleasant, something of exceeding value to the world. III. "Then said the trees unto the VINE, Come thou and reign over us." Surely there will be no refusal now! The vine cannot stand alone, it needs to be propped. It will leap at the offer of a throne, up which to climb and on which to hang its nodding clusters. It can only do one thing: it can bear clusters of grapes. Ah! but that one thing is of force and value enough to keep the vine steady under temptation. "Should I leave my wine," &c. As there are some human lives with sweetness in them as their main element, so there are some with this brighter, racier quality, which "cheers" and animates the spirits of others. Be a vine if you can be nothing more; distil and distribute the wine of life. IV. Now, at length, we go to the coronation. The trees have found a king. "Then said all the trees unto the BRAMBLE, Come thou and reign over us." Accepted as soon as offered! The bramble needs no time for deliberation. It accepts the crown at once. Look at the bramble or spiky thorn of Palestine with its long straggling branches. It has no "fatness" to leave, like the olive-tree; no "sweetness," like the fig-tree; no clusters, like the vine. It casts no shadow, like the oak. It has nothing but sharp, piercing spikes, and of these it has abundance; every branch is full of them—and yet hear how the mean creature speaks! "If in truth ye anoint me king over

you"—as if it were the most natural thing in the world that they should; as if it were thinking of its ripe baskets of fruit, and of the weary pilgrims it had sheltered. "If in truth ye anoint *me* king!" Think of it, in presence of them all! The cedar, nodding his dark plumes; the oak, with castled strength of stem and branch; the beech, in its sylvan beauty; the palm-tree, with its cylindrical stem and feathery leaves, and bounteous burden of dates; "and the fir-tree and the pine-tree and the box together"; and those that have declined the honour—to all these it says, "Come and put your trust in my shadow!" The unbounded impudence of this address is remarkable, and would be amusing if it were not connected with peril to the whole arboreous kingdom. This peril the bramble knows, and has the art to hold it out in audacious menace. "If not, think of it well. You have gone too far to go back, you are now in my power; and that the noblest among you shall feel the first, in case of the least show of opposition." Society, in all its sections, is full of bramble men, who are striving for every sort of personal elevation and advantage. By the picture in this parable I want you to scorn the principles they act upon; and to despise the honours and advantages they win! (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *Jotham's parable*:—We find instruction in the parable by regarding the answers put into the mouth of this tree and that when they are invited to wave to and fro over the others. There are honours which are dearly purchased, high positions which cannot be assumed without renouncing the true end and fruition of life. One for example, who is quietly and with increasing efficiency doing his part in a sphere to which he is adapted, must set aside the gains of long discipline if he is to become a social leader. He can do good where he is. Not so certain is it that he will be able to serve his fellows well in public office. It is one thing to enjoy the deference paid to a leader while the first enthusiasm on his behalf continues, but it is quite another thing to satisfy all the demands made as years go on and new needs arise. When any one is invited to take a position of authority he is bound to consider carefully his own aptitude. He needs also to consider those who are to be subjects or constituents, and make sure that they are of the kind his rule will fit. The olive looks at the cedar and the terebinth and the palm. Will they admit his sovereignty by and by though now they vote for it? Men are taken with the candidate who makes a good impression by emphasising what will please and suppressing opinions that may provoke dissent. When they know him, how will it be? When criticism begins, will the olive not be despised for its gnarled stem, its crooked branches and dusky foliage? The fable does not make the refusal of olive and fig-tree and vine rest on the comfort they enjoy in the humbler place. That would be a mean and dishonourable reason for refusing to serve. Men who decline public office because they love an easy life find here no countenance. It is for the sake of its fatness, the oil it yields, grateful to God and man in sacrifice and anointing, that the olive-tree declines. The fig-tree has its sweetness, and the vine its grapes to yield. And so men despising self-indulgence and comfort may be justified in putting aside a call to office. The fruit of a personal character developed in humble, unobtrusive natural life is seen to be better than the more showy clusters forced by public demands. Yet, on the other hand, if one will not leave his books, another his scientific hobbies, a third his fireside, a fourth his manufactory, in order to take his place among the magistrates of a city or the legislators of a land, the danger of bramble supremacy is near. Next a wretched Abimelech will appear; and what can be done but set him on high and put the reins in his hand? Unquestionably the claims of Church or country deserve most careful weighing, and even if there is a risk that character may lose its tender bloom, the sacrifice must be made in obedience to an urgent call. For a time, at least, the need of society at large must rule the loyal life. The fable of Jotham, in so far as it flings sarcasm at the persons who desire eminence for the sake of it and not for the good they will be able to do, is an example of that wisdom which is as unpopular now as ever it has been in human history, and the moral needs every day to be kept full in view. It is desire for distinction and power, the opportunity of waving to and fro over the trees, the right to use this handle and that to their names, that will be found to make many eager, not the distinct wish to accomplish something which the times and the country need. Those who solicit public office are far too often selfish, not self-denying, and even in the Church there is much vain ambition. But people will have it so. The crowd follows him who is eager for the suffrages of the crowd, and showers flattery and promises as he goes. Men are lifted into places they cannot fill, and after keeping their seats unsteadily

for a time they have to disappear into ignominy. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*) *Forms of usefulness in life*:—What special advantages of life, what particular forms of usefulness and comfort, Jotham had in view, if he had any, in choosing these particular trees, it is not easy to say. But it is obvious that he meant in a general way to point out that there are two or three functions, or employments, or ways of spending life, so much worth a man's while continuing, that he is wise in refusing to abandon them for the sake of what may seem a better position. It is very desirable that men should see the advantages of their own position, for nothing is more enervating than a craving after change, and nothing more delusive than the fancy that almost any other position would be better than our own. The "fatness" which the olive was not disposed to forsake in exchange for high position, may very naturally be supposed to symbolise the usefulness which belongs to many obscure positions in life. If we are filling a place that somebody must fill, if we are doing work which some one must do, then we should be cautious how we seek change. Moreover, in the life of most of us, the usefulness of our daily occupation is by no means the whole measure of our usefulness. We are mixed up in life with persons who are entangled in difficulties, who are full of faults, who are needing help: wherever we go, in whatever occupation we spend our time, we find this to be the case; and he is a happy man who can disentangle the sinner from the meshes of his sin and pluck his feet out of the net, who can let some tempted person have the strengthening influence of his society, who can give advice that saves from misery or loss. Again, many lives are soured and rendered wretched to all connected with them, because it is not recognised that sweetness is that to which they are specially called. The fig-tree did not think it was a necessary of life; it did not flatter itself men could not live without figs; but it was modestly and reasonably conscious that by bearing figs year after year it did add an element of a most desirable kind to the life of man. Taking the mere word of the fable, the "sweetness" of the fig, every one knows what a blessing in a household is even one sweet temper, one disposition that is not ruffled, that does not take offence, that does not think every one else in the wrong, that does not vaunt itself, but is quiet, reasonable, patient, meek. Peremptoriness is not always equivalent to efficiency. Any one who has tried to catch an unbridled horse in a field knows how little persuasive power there is in violent language. The assumption of a tone of authority or infallibility defeats the ends of persuasion quite as certainly as the admission of a tone of entreaty destroys the authority of one who should rightfully command. But a third lesson for individuals in private life, which we gather from this fable, is how contemptible a thing is display and worldly honour, and what is called style. People will not be content to live comfortably, to be moderate in their expenses, quiet in their ways; but must be doing as other people do, must commit the same extravagancies, even though they have really no taste for them; must deny themselves the enjoyments they prefer, that they may seem to enjoy themselves like their neighbours; bind themselves religiously to do many troublesome things, for no other reason whatever than that it is expected of them. The consequence is that the spirit becomes false, and the life is worn out by useless forms and meaningless labour; the useful services which might be rendered are neglected, and time cannot be found for them. In conclusion, Jotham shall not have spoken this parable in vain for us if we carry away from its perusal the settled conviction that in life there is something better than mere show or the mere attainment of the rewards accorded by the world to its successful men. The real value of human life does not lie on the surface; lies, indeed, so deep that very many people never see it at all. There are circumstances so afflicting and straitened, so very tormenting and hampering, that we are apt to think we do well if only we do not cry out and let all the world know how we suffer; but there is a better thing to do always, and that is, to set ourselves with patience and humble self-crucifixion to think of others and do our best for them. In the worst circumstances, in circumstances so perplexing we know not how to act, there always remains some duty we are aware of, some kind and loving thing we can do, and by doing which other duties become clearer. (*Marcus Dods, D.D.*) **The olive-tree said . . . Should I leave my fatness?**—*The refusing of leadership*:—I. THE VARIETIES WHICH GOD HAS MADE AMONG MEN. II. THE TEMPTATIONS TO WHICH WE ARE EXPOSED TO BE UNTRUE TO OUR DISTINCTIVE NATURE AND POSITION. III. THE EVIL WHICH WOULD ARISE FROM OUR GOING OUT OF OUR TRUE PLACE TO OBTAIN A VULGAR POWER. IV. THE WISE CONDUCT OF SOME IN RESISTING THE INJURIOUS TEMPTATIONS ADDRESSED TO THEM. V. THOSE WHO REFUSE FORMAL RULE

MAY BE KINGS IN THEIR SPHERES NOTWITHSTANDING—NAY, ALL THE MORE. VI. THE WORLD'S KING IS OFTEN THE BRAMBLE AFTER ALL. (*W. Morison, D.D.*) *The faithful olive-tree:*—The fable teaches that temptations will come to us all, however sweet, or useful, or fruitful, even as they came to the fig, the olive, and the vine. These temptations may take the shape of proffered honours; if not a crown, yet some form of preferment or power may be the bribe. I. APPARENT PROMOTIONS ARE NOT TO BE SNATCHED AT. The question is to be asked, "Should I?" Let us never do what would be unbecoming, unsuitable, unwise (Gen. xxxix. 9). Emphasis is to be laid on the "I." "Should 'I'?" If God has given me peculiar gifts or special grace, does it become me to trifle with these endowments? Should I give them up to gain honour for myself? (Neh. vi. 11). A higher position may seem desirable, but would it be right to gain it by such cost? (Jer. xlv. 5). It will involve duties and cares. "Go up and down among the trees" implies that there would be care, oversight, travelling, &c. These duties will be quite new to me; for, like an olive, I have been hitherto planted in one place. Should I run into new temptations, new difficulties, &c., of my own wanton will? Can I expect God's blessing upon such strange work? Put the question in the case of wealth, honour, power, which are set before us. Should we grasp at them at the risk of being less at peace, less holy, less prayerful, less useful? II. ACTUAL ADVANTAGES ARE NOT TO BE TRIFLED WITH. "Should I leave my fatness?" I have this great boon, should I lightly lose it? It is the greatest advantage in life to be useful both to God and man: "By me they honour God and man." We ought heartily to prize this high privilege. To leave this for anything which the world can offer would be great loss (Jer. xviii. 14, ii. 13). Our possession of fatness meets the temptation to become a king. We are happy enough in Christ, in His service, with His people, and in the prospect of the reward. We cannot better ourselves by the move; let us stay as we are. We may also meet it by the reflection that the prospect is startling: "Should I leave my fatness?" For an olive to do this would be unnatural: for a believer to leave holy living would be worse (John vi. 68). That the retrospect would be terrible: "leave my fatness." What must it be to have left grace, and truth, and holiness, and Christ? Remember Judas. That even an hour of such leaving would be a loss. What would an olive do even for a day if it left its fatness? That it would all end in disappointment; for nothing could compensate for leaving the Lord. All else is death (Jer. xvii. 13). That to abide firmly and reject all baits is like the saints, the martyrs, and their Lord; but to prefer honour to grace is a mere bramble folly. III. TEMPTATION SHOULD BE TURNED TO ACCOUNT. Let us take deeper root. The mere proposal to leave our fatness should make us hold the faster to it. Let us be on the watch that we lose not our joy, which is our fatness. If we would not leave it, neither can we bear that it should leave us. Let us yield more fatness, and bear more fruit: he who gains largely is all the further removed from loss. The more we increase in grace the less are we likely to leave it. Let us feel the more content, and speak the more lovingly of our gracious state, that none may dare to entice us. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) **The fig-tree said . . . Should I forsake my sweetness?**—*Self-fulfilment:*—There was to the fig-tree no excellency like that of meeting adequately its own ends and of fulfilling its own inborn purpose. The fig-tree was not created to be a king among the trees. That was not its selected part or its appointed task. The oak and the cedar might be great in strength, the ash and the willow might be exalted for beauty, but in its own way of being great the fig-tree had a dignity all its own; measured by what it was meant to be and by what it was meant to do it might rest, secure for all time of usefulness and of honour. The real measure of the success or failure of each life is thoroughly and exactly the measure of its self-fulfilment. Centuries afterwards a Greek philosopher laid hold of this same principle, and he gave to it a more philosophical interpretation, a profounder application to the life of man; but Aristotle did not teach the lesson of it more finely, he did not illustrate it more happily, than had been done before in this passage. The measure of the success or failure of each life is thoroughly and exactly the measure of its self-fulfilment. As with the fig-tree, it is the excellency of man to live and to be fruitful in those powers which are distinctly his own; to be rational because he alone is truly rational; to be moral because he alone is moral; to be spiritual because he alone within the earth is breathed upon from a higher world, and hears with a . . per hearing a music and a song which hath not been uttered, Nature and God [illegible] ask of man not the life of the tree or of the brute or of the angel, but the li[illegible] of man as man. For man to turn from the culture of that

rational and moral life which is distinctively his own, for man to yield his own peculiar task, for him to forsake the high inheritances of rational freedom and of moral purpose, is to tear from his own experience, to cut from out his history, the very justification of his existence in the world. Let him look well to that. It is not his life to be merely strong. When we look for strength we will not look to him. We will not look for strength to man, but to the deep-settled hills laid strong and sure among the rocks; to the wild waters of the flood as they beat and scream in their ruin of the land; to the winds of heaven as they fall sharply upon the sea; to the great fish within the deep; to the huge beast within the forest; to a thousand things in earth and sky; but we will not look for strength to man. Nor is it man's life or woman's to be merely beautiful. When we look for beauty we will not look to man, but we will look far out upon some deep blue quiet of the hills, to the unfolding glories of the new day, to the sweet radiance of those tears which the dying night has left upon the flowers; we will look to corals of the sea, to diamonds from the under-world, to the waving shadows of the forest and the fields. To these we will look for beauty, but not to man. Let man keep and wear the graces which as man are his; let woman be dowered in those beauties which are all and peculiarly her own; but let that motive die within us which has no task for man or woman but those sad and empty services of flesh, those weak apparent shows of lust or ease or wealth. Oh, for men whose first and thorough task will be that of being men! Oh, for women whose souls and hearts are set deeply in the purpose of being and of serving under woman's name in those causes which are all her own, among those dignities and sanctities which make with men her queenliness and saintliness for ever! If there is need to-day for a humanity which is human—for manly men, for womanly women, for childlike children—there is need also for a churchly Church. Institutions as well as individuals have their primary uses and their distinctive life. The Church, too, if she is to continue among men, must act truly and deeply from her own powers, must be strong in a Church's spirit, instinct and eager with the Church's mission. The life of the Church may have its social aspect, it may have in a sense its business aspect, it has been forced to have in certain quarters an aspect which is purely political; but the measure of her exclusive and especial triumphs along lines like these is exactly the measure of man's detestation of her cause. The Church, to be the Church, must be primarily and essentially religious. There are individual Churches which are not successful in any sense, but the Church which is successful in the life God sends her out to live, that Church which in a religious sense is a success must be a success in all senses and for all wise and honourable work. (*E. G. Murphy.*) The bramble said.—*Bramble rule; or, the people and their leaders:* —I. THAT THE PEOPLE HAVE A CONSCIOUS WANT OF LEADERS, AND THEY ARE NOT PARTICULAR IN THEIR CHOICE OF THEM. 1. The people in every age have needed leaders in every department of life—mercantile, artistic, political, and especially religious. The uncultured masses have ever been ignorant, credulous, servile. 2. And they are conscious of their want. This arises from—(1) An instinctive faith that there is somewhere an unpossessed good for them. (2) A consciousness that they are incapable of reaching it themselves. (3) A conviction that there are members of the race superior to themselves. 3. That the people are not particular in their choice of leaders. They do not generally follow the greatest men. Men of inferior capacity and uncultivated nature are scarcely qualified to appreciate the highest form of greatness. Great men to them are masters whom they martyr. II. THAT INFERIOR MEN ARE OFTEN MORE READY TO ASSUME THE RESPONSIBILITY OF LEADERSHIP THAN GREAT ONES. The greater a man is, the less taste he has for a conventional greatness, the greater resources he has in himself, and more disposed is he to work in the glorious realms of principles than amidst the din of social parties. Great men build their own thrones, and establish their own empires. III. THAT LEADERSHIP IN THE HANDS OF INFERIOR MEN IS EVER FRAUGHT WITH MISCHIEF. 1. Small men can do great mischief. 2. The higher the office they reach, the greater the mischief they can effect. Learn—1. The sad condition of the world. 2. The transcendent worth of the gospel. Christ is just the Leader needed. (*Homilist.*) *Pulpit brambles; or, a vacant Church making a choice of a minister:*—1. Jotham's parable is full of interest. (1) On account of its antiquity. First on record. (2) The spirit of its delivery. [illegible] of the humorous. (3) The sarcasm it contains. The satiric is a most useful gift to the Christian teacher, when guided by the hand of wisdom. 2. The principle contained in the parable is, that the highest places ought to be occupied by the best of men, and

that the bramble people should never be allowed to occupy a position of greatness. 3. From Jotham's parable the following remarks are suggested—(1) That it is a time of great responsibility to Churches when making choice of a minister. Christ spent a night in prayer before He ordained His apostles. (2) That Churches sometimes show a great want of shrewdness in their choice of a minister. (3) That Churches ought to keep a view to the practical in giving a call to a minister. (4) That very often we find the most insignificant ministers are the most ready to accept invitations from large Churches. (5) That a stated ministry is advantageous to Churches. (6) That great evils follow in the choice of unsuitable ministers. (7) That Churches will never reach their true position while their pulpits are filled with brambles. Conclusion—1. That the ministerial life is one of great sacrifice. 2. That most frequently the ministerial brambles are blessed with unanimous calls. 3. That the men of small talent, almost without exception, are full of vanity. 4. That the great force of the bramble pulpit is in destruction. 5. Some of our large Churches have frequently been deservedly punished when they have lost their old minister. (*Ibid.*) *King Bramble and his subjects*:—Why were the trees so willing to enthrone "Bramble"? The trees argued: "If we make Bramble king, he will never find fault, and never dare chide us for shortcomings—he is so puny and worthless compared with us." So men reason, all over the globe. Do you know why men possessing just as much good common-sense as you have, still cling to idols in heathen lands? Many of them know as well as we do that their idols are worthless. Why keep them? Because with these for gods, they make religion as base and sensual as they desire. But we need not search heathen lands. In our own midst are people who serve King Bramble rather than King Jesus. I. The bramble of INTEMPERANCE. Do you suppose that any boy ever starts out in life with the intention of being a drunkard? He who yields in the least degree is in danger of being overpowered and ruined by this King Bramble. II. Bramble of MAMMON. Just enough affords more happiness than too much. III. Most dangerous bramble of all is SELF. We all need to pray for deliverance from the evil which is in our own hearts. One of the most cunning devices by which Satan entraps men is that of making them worship themselves rather than God. (*A. F. Vedder.*) *The bramble*:—1. How proud the bramble was! "Come and put your trust in my shadow." Are boys and girls proud? I think so. And yet they have no more reason to be proud than the foolish bramble. They are entirely dependent on the bounty of a gracious Providence, and He hates pride. But why are we proud? We cannot boast of our clothes—these are given to us by animals. Why, what is more beautiful than the butterfly, that flits about in the sunshine, or the tiny flower growing by the roadside? Both insect and flower appear in better coats than we. 2. Another thing we may notice about the bramble—its insufficiency for shelter. It said to all the trees: "Come, put your trust in my shadow." The lesson to be learnt from this parable is the folly of false trust. The Bible in many places warns us against false trusts. It warns us against trusting ourselves. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool." Some trust in riches. This is not safe. For riches sometimes take to themselves wings and fly away; moreover, they profit not in the day of wrath. Then in whom shall we trust? In the Lord, for we read: "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes." We should trust in Him for our salvation. There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. 3. Then, the weakness of the bramble reminds us of its insufficiency for defence. Such a plant could easily be trodden down. The careless ox cannot crush the cedar, or the olive, or the fig-tree so easily as it can crush the bramble. A defence indicates the existence of enemies. You and I have enemies, and it is necessary that we should be guarded against them. They are round us—on every hand. Jesus Christ is not only a shelter, but a defence. 4. The bramble reminds us of sin. Sin is like a thorn. It pierces, it irritates, it wounds. (*H. Whittaker.*) *Misleading self-judgments*:—Many are misled, because they judge themselves too much by the impression they make upon those around them. To them, in that sense, *vox populi* is *vox Dei*. If they are popular in their own circle, they think proportionately well of themselves. But this is manifestly an empirical judgment. It depends very much on the circle to which we belong; on the mental and moral attainments of those in it; on the natural affection they cherish towards us, which predisposes them in our favour; and on the ideal they hold generally of character and worth. A solid is buoyant in a liquid in proportion as it is light, and the

liquid heavy, floating or sinking according as it is heavier or lighter, bulk for bulk, than the liquid it is in. And similarly we may judge of a man's moral and intellectual weight by the kind of society he floats in. The company which will buoy up one man will not sustain another, and in light, frivolous society, a silly, empty fellow may successfully keep on the surface, inflated only with his own self-conceit. In judging ourselves by the opinions of those around us, therefore, let us ask what their opinions are worth, and how far they are determined by principles which will decide eternal destiny. (*A. Rowland, B.A.*)

Ver. 23. **God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem.**—*Disunion :*—It is not said that he was judge over Israel, for they were raised up by God, but he ruled and usurped, as tyrants use to do. And to begin first with his prosperity in that God gave him this short time to enjoy his desire, and to domineer as he did, it is to teach us that He doth for some little time give wicked men their longed-for desires; and yet not for that He applaudeth them therein, but that they may have time to repent, and to bethink themselves what they have done, and how they have gone to work, and how many ways they have provoked God. But to go forward: this evil spirit that was sent betwixt them, being the first occasion of their overthrow, was the devil, by whose malice and subtlety ill-will and hatred were kindled betwixt them, and this, with the breaking their promise, doth show us clearly that the league and friendship of the wicked is soon broken off. For why? It hath no good ground. The use whereof is that we make no such wicked and cursed leagues. Secondly, that we account no otherwise of them where they be made, but as of the spider's web, soon swept down; and thirdly, praise God highly when we see them broken. And in that it is said that the Lord sent an evil spirit betwixt them, we may note, that though God be not the author of evil, yet that sin which is in the wicked, hidden in their hearts, and never so secret, He bringeth forth at His pleasure, and lets it break out at His commandment, ruling and overruling the same. And they that nourish it in themselves, and do not give it a vent by repentance, may ever justly fear, and do sometime too truly find, that as water pent in breaks out violently in some place or other, even so the sin that is entertained in men's hearts shall one time or other break out to their shame in their lives. But as the stink of the dunghill riseth not from the sun, no more doth sin proceed from God. Also, by this division betwixt them we may note, that when God suffers division among the wicked, or an evil spirit any way to lead them, it is to punish their lewd fellowship, and to revenge the sin of both parts, and to make each the other's executioner. And yet, oh what a sweet liberty it is thought to be, to enjoy fellowship with such? And first, grudges secretly being conceived, they are nourished by jealousies and suspicions exasperated by daily injuries, till they break out into hatred, and end in extremity. These things are commonly seen, but who beholdeth God's justice therein? or is thereby prevented from having anything to do with such? or made wise to lay a better foundation of their amity and friendship. Furthermore, by this, that God would have the blood of the innocent sons of Gideon revenged upon Abimelech and the men of Shechem, He teacheth us that He will revenge the innocents' cause. The Lord will bless them that bless His, and curse them that curse His. (*R. Rogers.*)

Vers. 48, 49. **And Abimelech took an axe in his hand.**—*The storming of the temple of Berith :*—1. I learn first from this subject, the folly of depending upon any one form of tactics in anything we have to do for this world or for God. Look over the weaponry of olden times—javelins, battle-axes, habergeons—and show me a single weapon with which Abimelech and his men could have gained such complete triumph. It is no easy thing to take a temple thus armed. Yet here Abimelech and his army come up, they surround this temple, and they capture it without the loss of a single man on the part of Abimelech, although I suppose some of the old Israelitish heroes told Abimelech: "You are only going up there to be cut to pieces." Yet you are willing to testify to-day that by no other mode—certainly not by ordinary modes—could that temple so easily, so thoroughly, have been taken. What the Church most wants to learn, this day, is that any plan is right, is lawful, is best, which helps to overthrow the temple of sin, and capture this world for God. We are very apt to stick to the old modes of attack. We come up with the sharp, keen, glittering steel spear of argument, expecting in that way to take the castle; but they have a thousand spears where we have ten. And so the castle of sin stands. I propose a different style of tactics. Let each one go

to the forest of God's promise and invitation, and hew down a branch, and put it on his shoulder, and let us all come around these obstinate iniquities, and then, with this pile, kindled by the fires of a holy zeal and the flames of a consecrated life, we will burn them out. What steel cannot do, fire may. We want more heart in our song, more heart in our almsgiving, more heart in our prayers, more heart in our preaching. Oh, for less of Abimelech's sword and more of Abimelech's conflagration! The gospel is not a syllogism; it is not casuistry; it is not polemics, or the science of squabble. It is blood-red fact; it is warm-hearted invitation; it is leaping, bounding, flying good news; it is efflorescent with all light; it is rubescent with all summery glow; it is arborescent with all sweet shade. 2. Still further, I learn from this subject the power of example. If Abimelech had sat down on the grass, and told his men to go and get the boughs, and go out to the battle, they would never have gone at all, or if they had, it would have been without any spirit or effective result; but when Abimelech goes with his own axe and hews down a branch, and with Abimelech's arm puts it on Abimelech's shoulder, and marches on, then, my text says, all the people did the same. How natural that was! What made Garibaldi and Stonewall Jackson the most magnetic commanders of this century? They always rode ahead. Oh, the overwhelming power of example! Oh, start out for heaven to-day, and your family will come after you, and your business associates will come after you, and your social friends will join you. With one branch of the tree of life for a bâton, marshal just as many as you can gather. Oh, the infinite, the semi-omnipotent power of a good or a bad example! 3. Still further, I learn from this subject the advantage of concerted action. If Abimelech had merely gone out with a tree-branch, the work would not have been accomplished, or if ten, twenty, or thirty men had gone; but when all the axes are lifted, and all the sharp edges fall, and all these men carry each his tree-branch down and throw it about the temple, the victory is gained—the temple falls. Where there is one man in the Church of God at this day shouldering his whole duty, there are a great many who never lift an axe or swing a bough. It seems to me as if there were ten drones in every hive to one busy bee. What broken bone of sorrow have you ever set? Are you doing nothing? Is it possible that a man or woman sworn to be a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ is doing nothing? 4. Still further, I learn from this subject the danger of false refuges. As soon as these Shechemites got into the temple, they thought they were safe. They said: "Berith will take care of us. Abimelech may batter down everything else; he cannot batter down this temple where we are now hid." But very soon they heard the timbers crackling, and they were smothered with smoke, and they miserably died. And you and I are just as much tempted to false refuges. The mirror this morning may have persuaded you that you have a comely cheek; Satan may have told you that you are all right; but bear with me if I tell you that, if unpardoned, you are all wrong. I suppose every man is stepping into some kind of refuge. Here you step into the tower of good works. You say, "I shall be safe here in this refuge." The battlements are adorned; the steps are varnished; on the wall are pictures of all the suffering you have alleviated, and all the schools you have established, and all the fine things you have ever done. Up in that tower you feel you are safe. But hear you not the tramp of your unpardoned sins all around the tower? They each have a match. You are kindling the combustible material. You feel the heat and the suffocation. Oh! may you leap in time, the gospel declaring, "By the deeds of the law shall no flesh living be justified." "Well," you say, "I have been driven out of that tower; where shall I go?" Step into this tower of indifference. You say, "If this tower is attacked, it will be a great while before it is taken." You feel at ease. But there is an Abimelech, with ruthless assault, coming on. Death and his forces are gathering around. "But," says some one, "you are engaged in a very mean business, driving us from tower to tower." Oh no! I want to tell you of a Gibraltar that never has been and never will be taken; of a bulwark that the judgment earthquakes cannot budge. The Bible refers to it when it says: "In God is thy refuge, and underneath thee are the everlasting arms." Oh! fling yourself into it. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

CHAPTER X.

VER. 14. **Cry unto the gods which ye have chosen.**—*Man in trouble crying to his god* :—I. EVERY SINNER IS DESTINED TO MEET WITH TROUBLE. Personal afflictions; social bereavements; death. II. IN GREAT TROUBLE HE INSTINCTIVELY CRIES TO HIS GOD. 1. Every man has a god. 2. Every man's god ought to be able to help him when help is needed. III. NO GOD CAN HELP HIM IN TROUBLE BUT THE TRUE ONE. (*Homilist.*) *No help in trouble save from God* :—Travellers tell us that they who are at the top of the Alps can see great showers of rain fall under them, but not a drop of it falls on them. They who have God for their portion are in a high tower, and thereby safe from all troubles and showers. A drift rain of evil will beat in at the creature's windows, be they never so well pointed: all the garments this world can make up cannot keep them that travel in such weather from being wet to the skin. No creature is able to bear the weight of its fellow-creature, but as reeds break under, and as thorns run into the sides that lean on them. The bow drawn beyond its compass breaks in sunder, and the string wound above its strength snaps in pieces. Such are outward helps to all that trust to them in hardships. (*G. Swinnock.*) *Helpless gods* :—It is a most grievous casting them in the teeth, by an ironical mocking of them with their idolatry, as if he should say, "Now ye prove and see what your gods can do." As Elias did the like to the prophets of Baal. Therefore by thus speaking, and bidding them go seek help at their idols' hands, they having shaken off the Lord, he teacheth us that they whom we have served, and committed ourselves to, must pay us our wages, and to them the Lord justly doth and will send us to their patronage in our greatest need, even to our horror, yea, destruction, if He take us not, as He did these here, to His mercy. They therefore that have trusted, and still do in man, and have made flesh their arm, shall know by experience one day that they have trusted to a bruised reed. Briefly to conclude this doctrine with some other uses thereof, we see secondly by this that God doth import no less than that (by the law of like equity, and by virtue of a far stronger covenant) if this people had persisted faithful in His service He could not have denied their suit for help and defence against their enemies. Thirdly, these words note out this, that it is wisdom for a man to bestow his chief cost there whence he looks for best recompense and acknowledgment in the time of most need. A man is not ashamed of that labour which hath brought him in plentiful gain, but of that which answers not his cost and hope. Men that have run themselves out of breath all their life, groping after a blind happiness, in their unprofitable, superstitious, profane course, at length, seeing themselves deceived, wish they had served a Master who might have saved them and received them into everlasting habitations. Thus the Lord is fain to upbraid men (though not by word, saying, "Go to your idols," yet in effect, in that He leaveth them shiftless), or else who should persuade one of a hundred that he soweth among thorns, or loseth his labour and cost, when he casteth it and himself away upon idols? (*R. Rogers.*) *The misery of forsaking God* :—I know not how anything can be imagined more sublime, more edifying, or more truly affecting than the delineations of the moral character of the Almighty Governor of the universe, afforded us by Scripture. Immensity of power, combined with the most unrestricted condescension to the wants of the meanest of His creatures; and purity, which charges the very heavens with comparative uncleanness, united with plenitude of compassion. Perhaps, however, there is no passage in the book of the Old Testament more completely to this purpose than the text. Now, be it remembered, that a correct theory of the Divine Being, and sound views of practical morality, are as closely connected with each other as cause and effect. All real morality being the adaptation of our actions to some authentic first rule, and that rule being the presumed will of the great Being who has an undisputed claim to our obedience, it follows as a matter of course that, in order that our standard of morals should be high, our notions of Him to whose approbation that standard is referable should be high in a like proportion. We might as well expect the subsequent course of a stream to be more elevated than its fountain as imagine holy and perfect actions to proceed from belief in an imperfect or impure deity. This consideration will at once show us that spiritual debasement is a necessary result of false worship; and will point out the fallaciousness of that favourite assertion of the unbeliever, that accuracy of our abstract notions respecting the Deity is of no consequence provided our practical theory of morality be correct. And now, then,

by this infallible test let us try the Christian revelation, comparing it with all that the most plausible surmises of pagan philosophy, or of modern infidelity, have at any time suggested in opposition or rivalry to it. The more substantial theories of paganism on this subject lie in very small compass. It is true that the better disposed heathens in all ages have, from an instinctive feeling of religion, been ready to admit the occasional intervention of Providence with the affairs of mankind, and something like a general system of rewards and punishments, having reference to the morality of human actions. These opinions, however, so far as they went, were, I believe, on all such occasions, rather the spontaneous suggestion of the moral feeling within them, acting against theory, than the result of any deliberate assent of the understanding, founded upon rational inquiry. In fact, I know only of two views of the great question, "What is God?" or, "What is the great moral sanction for the guidance of man's actions?" as taken up after mature deliberation by the philosophers of antiquity, which can lay claim to the character of a regular system; the one is that adopted by the Stoics, which pronounces virtue to be so intrinsically lovely in itself as, under all external circumstances, to prove its own reward; the other, that which, though not formally avowed, would, if strictly reasoned out, necessarily result from the principles of the Peripatetics, which, considering the Creator of the universe as the summit of all possible perfection, would represent Him as eternally wrapt up in the contemplation of His own transcendental nature, and consequently indifferent to the vicissitudes which may befall inferior beings. Now it is obvious that both these views, either if entertained as physically true, as affording a substantial first principle of religious morality, are quite unsatisfactory and inoperative. Strange, then, as the proposition may sound in the ears of those who have not been accustomed to consider the doctrines of paganism in all their strictness and in all their consequences, it is undoubtedly true that the belief in a Being at once all perfect in His own nature, and yet at the same time watchfully attentive to all that passes in the creation beneath Him, is the result of revelation only. Our natural reason not only never could have arrived at such a conclusion, but in fact, at the first blush of the question, it absolutely recoils from it. Can God really regard, not merely perishable man, but even the very worms that creep at our feet? Our first impulse, when we consider the presumed impassiveness of His nature, is to say, "Certainly not." How can He be at once complete in His own perfection and happiness and accessible to prayer; or, in other words, liable to be influenced by causes external to Himself? Our natural reason is quite unequal to the solution of this difficulty. It is only, I repeat, when we reflect how entirely the whole sum and substance of religion, the elevation of our souls, the establishment of all morality, and the consequent entire welfare of society turn upon this very doctrine, that we learn how much more complete is the revealed wisdom which is from heaven than that which it is given to unassisted man to find out. The question is, not what God might have done, but what He actually has done. The infidel may try to get rid of the difficulty by turning the whole discussion into ridicule, and attempting to show that human life, and all connected with it, is merely like a feverish dream or an ill-told tale without object or connection. The worldly man may assert that, after all that may be said against it, life is still a state of tolerable ease and comfort, and contented with living like the brutes, may think it unnecessary to inquire further; or the more stern philosopher, arguing upon the principles of the ancient Stoics, may assert, contrary to self-evident fact, that life in reality possesses no evil for the truly wise, and that the theory of a future state is not necessary for the vindication of the ways of Providence. But meanwhile the really painful circumstances of our existence will make themselves felt, whether we will or not; and, if we would explain them in a manner satisfactory to our highest notions of God's goodness, we must have recourse to our Bible. I do not, indeed, say that even in our Bibles we shall find all our difficulties removed. Very far from it; but I do say, that the Bible presupposes the existence of all these very difficulties; that the theory of the Bible would be false did we not find the world precisely what we do find it; and that the great object of the Bible is to show how this very state of things (the great stumbling-block of every other form of religious belief) is part and parcel of the Divine arrangements for the accomplishment of God's wise and beneficent purposes. Let us pass on to the inferences resulting from these momentous facts. Consider, then, in what a new position, with respect to everything around us, we are all of us placed by this circumstance of the intimate, and almost social, connection which revelation thus declares to exist between ourselves and our Maker. What a vast interest is communicated to the whole tenor of our

existence when we recollect that we are not, as heathen speculation would teach us, placed as in a dreary moral solitude, withdrawn from the superintendence of the Divine mind, who has other and better occupations than to trouble Himself with the details of our sorrows or of our pleasures, of our good or of our bad actions; but that we subsist day and night under His all-searching eye; that not a thought passes through our breasts, not a word escapes our lips, but is pregnant with the consequences of our future weal or woe; that every apparent blessing, every seeming evil with which we are visited, has its peculiar errand and object, viz., the disciplining of our hearts, and the preparing us for immortality! (*Bp. Shuttleworth.*)

CHAPTER XI.

VERS. 1–33. **Jephthah the Gileadite.**—*Jephthah*:—It is common to regard Jephthah as one of the wildest characters of the Bible—a rough and heedless man; alike rash in vowing and heartless in fulfilling; one whom it is strange to find in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. Jephthah was neither a godless nor a selfish man. Not godless, for we find in the brief annals of his life more copious recognition of God than in the case of most of the other judges; and not selfish, because, forgetting his private wrongs, he devoted his life to the service of his country, and, overcoming his strongest feelings of natural affection, he did with his daughter according to his vow. We shall be nearer the truth if we regard Jephthah as a good man, sadly misguided; a man roughly trained, poorly educated, and very deficient in enlightened views; wishing to serve God, but in great error as to what would prove an acceptable service; a man in whose religion the ideas of his neighbours of Moab and Ammon had a strong though unknown influence; one who, with the deepest loyalty to God, had unconsciously come under the delusion that Jehovah would accept of such an offering as the neighbouring nations offered to their gods. In trying to estimate Jephthah aright it is necessary that we bear his early history vividly in mind. He had the grievous misfortune to have a wicked mother, a woman of abandoned character; and as in these circumstances his father could not have been much better, his childhood must have been very dreary. No good example, no holy home, no mother's affection, no father's wise and weighty counsel. If Jephthah owed little to his parents, he owed less to his brothers. If he knew little of the sunbeams of parental love, he knew less of the amenities of brotherly affection. By his brothers he was, as we may say, kicked out from his father's house; he was driven forth into the wide, wide world, to shift as he might; and this under the influence of a motive all too common, but which in this case appears in all its native repulsiveness. It was to prevent him from sharing in his father's inheritance; to keep to themselves the largest possible share. A wretched revelation truly of family spirit! None of the dew of Hermon here. The life to which, in these circumstances, Jephthah resorted was wild and rough, but was not considered immoral in those wild times. He became a freebooter on the borders of Moab and Ammon, like many a borderer two or three centuries ago in Cumberland or Wigton; carrying on an irregular warfare in the form of raids for plunder; gathering to himself the riff-raff of the country-side. The occupation was very unfavourable to a religious life, and yet somehow (such is the sovereignty of grace) Jephthah evidently acquired deep religious impressions. He was strong against idolatry, and that not merely because it was the religion of his enemies, but because he had a deep regard for the God of Israel, and had been led in some way to recognise the obligation to serve Him only, and to be jealous for His glory. And, partly perhaps through the great self-control which this enabled him to exercise, and the courageous spirit which a living belief in such a God inspired, he had risen to great distinction as a warrior in the mode of life which he followed, so that when a leader was needed to contend with the Ammonites, Jephthah was beyond all question the man most fitted for the post. It is very singular how things come round. What a strange feeling Jephthah must have had when his brothers and old neighbours came to him, inviting and imploring him to become their head; trying as best they could to undo their former unkindness, and get him, for their safety, to assume the post for which not one of them was fitted! It is amazing what an ill-treated man

may gain by patiently biding his time. In every history there are parallel incidents to that which now occurred in the case of Jephthah—that of Coriolanus, for example; but it is not every one who has proved so prompt and patriotic. He gave way to no reproach over the past, but only made conditions for the future which were alike reasonable and moderate. His promptness supplies a great and oft-needed lesson for Christians; showing how ready we should be to forgive and forget ill-treatment; to return blessing for cursing, and good for evil. But let us now notice what was peculiar in Jephthah's mode of accepting office. In contemplating the prospect of the Ammonites being subdued, it is not he, but Jehovah, whom he regards as the victor (chap. xi. 9); and after he has been made head and captain he utters all his words before the Lord at Mizpeh (ver. 11). And now it was that he made his fatal vow. He made it as a new pledge of his dependence on God, and desire to honour Him. The strangest thing about the transaction is, that Jephthah should have been allowed in these circumstances to make such a vow. It was common enough in times of great anxiety and danger to devote some much-valued object to God. But Jephthah left it to God, as it were, to select the object. He would not specify it, but would simply engage, if he should return in peace from the children of Ammon, to offer to the Lord whatever should come forth from the doors of his house to meet him. It seemed a pious act to leave to God the selection of that object. Jephthah's error lay in supposing that God would select, that God would accept the responsibility which he laid upon Him. What followed we hardly need to rehearse. But what became of Jephthah's daughter? Undoubtedly the weight of evidence is in favour of the solution that, like Iphigenia at Aulis, Jephthah's daughter was offered as a burnt-offering. It is a shocking thought, and yet not inconsistent with the supposition that essentially Jephthah was a sincere and loyal servant of God. We must remember that he was an unenlightened man, ill brought up, not possessing the cool, well-balanced judgment of one who had calmly and carefully studied things human and Divine with the best lights of the age, but subject to many an impulse and prejudice that had never been corrected, and had at last become rooted in his nature. We must remember that Gilead was the most remote and least enlightened part of the land of Israel, and that all around, among all his Moabite and Ammonite neighbours, the impression prevailed that human sacrifices were acceptable to the gods. This remarkable narrative carries some striking lessons. 1. In the first place, there is a lesson from the strange, unexpected, and most unseasonable combination in Jephthah's experience of triumph and desolation, public joy and private anguish. It seems so unsuitable, when all hearts are wound up to the feeling of triumph, that horror and desolation should come upon them and overwhelm them. But what seems so unseasonable is what often happens. It often seems as if it would be too much for men to enjoy the fulfilment of their highest aspirations without something of an opposite kind. General Wolfe and Lord Nelson dying in the moment of victory are types of a not infrequent experience. At the moment when Ezekiel attains his highest prophetical elevation, his house is made desolate, his wife dies. The millionaire that has scraped and saved and struggled to leave a fortune to his only son is often called to lay him in the grave. Providence has a wonderful store of compensations. Sometimes those who are highest in worldly position are the dreariest and most desolate in heart. 2. Another striking lesson of Jephthah's life concerns the errors of good men. It dissipates the notion that good men cannot go far wrong. But let us learn from Jephthah all the good we can. He was remarkable for two great qualities. He depended for everything on God; he dedicated everything to God. It is the very spirit which the gospel of Jesus Christ is designed to form and promote. Jephthah was willing, according to his light, to give up to God the dearest object of his heart. One thing is very certain. Such sacrifices can be looked for from none but those who have been reconciled to God by Jesus Christ. To them, but only to them, God has become all in all. They, and they only, can afford to sacrifice all that is seen and temporal. (*W. G. Blaikie, D.D.*) **Why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress?**—The elders of Gilead got into trouble, and they said, "We are in distress; 'we turn again to thee,'" &c. Jephthah mocked them, and said, "If I fight for you and win 'shall I be your head?'" Who can tell how suggestively he uttered the word "your"?—head of a mob of ingrates—"your": and his heart said, "Ha, ha! 'Why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress?' Why did you not come twelve months ago? Why did you not come when the feast was on the table smoking hot? Why did you not ask me to the dance and the revel and the high

glee of Gilead? Here you are like a number of whipped hounds coming to me in your poverty and weakness and humiliation; you have come to the bastard." It was not a resentful speech: it was the eloquence of a noble man. Some people can only be taught when they are whipped. These people belonged to that bad quality. Have we not here a revelation of human nature? Can we boast ourselves against the elders of Gilead and say we are of a higher quality? Are we not all guilty before one another in this very respect? There are some men we never write to except when we want something. They never received a friendly letter from us in their lives. The moment we come into distress or difficulty then we write to those men and call them friends. We pay our friends unconsciously a high tribute by going to them again and again in our distress. Our going, being translated into language, means, "We have come again; every other door is shut against us; this kind, hospitable home-door was never thrust in our faces, it was always opened by some kindly hand: the last time we came it was for help, we have come on the same errand again." This may be mean enough on our part, and yet there is an unconscious tribute to the very friends whom we neglected in the time of our strength and prosperity. See how this same question penetrates the whole warp and woof, the whole web of life and thought. Sometimes it is the Church that asks the question. The Church says to some applicants for admission, "'Why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress?' You never come in the summer-time. you never come in the fair weather: why are ye come to me now when ye are in distress? What has brought you? Which of God's constables has arrested you and planted you in this prison? Trouble is your gaoler, and he has turned the key of the prison upon you in Church." There are people we use thus meanly, and the Church may be used often on this low ground. We go when we are sad. But are we aware that here also we are paying an unconscious tribute to the Church and to everything that is centralised and glorified by that Divine emblem? The Church wants you to come in the time of distress. The Church is not an upbraiding mother. She may utter a sigh over you as she sees your ragged and destitute condition, but she admits you all the same and tells you to go up higher. If our friends can ask the question of Jephthah, if the Church can put the same inquiry, so in very deed and in the fullest significance can the Bible. Who goes to the Bible in the summer-time? The dear old Bible says to many of us, "What, you back again? What has happened now? Some one dead? property lost? not well? What do you want with me to-day? Tell me your case; don't profess you love me and want me for my own sake; tell me what it is you want before you begin, and I will open at the place." It is God's book, because it is so lovely and so sweet and so large of heart. So far we have taken an advancing line. We began with our friends, we passed through the Church, then we went to the Bible, and now we go to God. This is the Divine inquiry: "Why are ye come to Me now when ye are in distress?" This is the great hold which God has upon us all. His family would be very small but for the distress of the world. His heaven can hardly hold His household because of this wearying trouble, this eternal want, this gnawing worm of discontent. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) Jephthah vowed a vow unto the Lord.—*Jephthah's vow*:—I. How the Lord suffereth good men and wise men to snare themselves, and bring needless sorrows and woes on themselves by temerity and rashness (1 Sam. xxv. 34; Matt. xxvi. 31). 1. The folly of man's heart, which would walk at large, unconfined within the rules of wisdom; this makes men rash even in the things of God, as here. 2. God's just desertion of good men, for their humiliation; and to give them experience of themselves, and how their own wisdom will make them befool themselves, as David did after his rash numbering of the people, and cleave more close to God and His counsel, when they see their own counsels prove fit for nothing but to cast them down. To be well advised in that we do or speak, avoid temerity and rashness, by which, making more haste than good speed, men do but brew their own sorrow. Consider—1. That rashness doeth nothing well (Prov. xv. 22). "Without counsel thoughts come to nought," and the hasty man, we say, never wants woe. Herod himself, as wicked as he was, was sorry for his rash oath; and yet how mischievous was it, against the life of John Baptist! A man going in haste easily slideth (Prov. xix. 2). 2. A note of a man fearing God is to carry his matters with discretion (Psa. cxii. 5). "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of true wisdom." 3. The law rejected a blind sacrifice; the gospel requireth a reasonable (Rom. xii. 1); and all sacrifices must be seasoned with the salt of discretion. 4. Rashness and temerity lays us bare and naked to the lashes of God, of men, and of our own con-

sciences. Rules of direction to avoid this sin of rashness, attended with so much sorrow. First, watch carefully against thine own rashness in—1. Judgment. 2. Affections. 3. Speeches. 4. Actions. 5. Passions. Secondly, arm thyself with the rules of Christian prudence to avoid this sin, and the sorrow of it; as knowing that it is not enough to be a faithful servant, but he must be wise too. II. THE LORD COMMONLY EXALTING HIS SERVANTS WITH SOME HIGH FAVOUR, BRINGS SOME STINGING CROSS WITH IT, TO HUMBLE THEM. 1. The Lord spies in us a lewd nature and disposition, even like that of the spider, which can turn everything into poison. There is in the best a root of pride and vanity which in prosperity and warm sunshine sprouteth and grows wonderfully stiff. Paul himself is in danger to be exalted out of measure by abundance of revelation; and therefore the Lord, as a wise physician, adds a dose of affliction to be an antidote to expel the poison of pride, and with a prick lets out the wind of vainglory. 2. This height of honours, success, &c., easily gaineth our affections and delights, and so draws and steals away our delights in the Lord. We are prone to idolise them, and to give them our hearts, and therefore the Lord is forced to pull our hearts from them, and by some buffetings and cooling cards, tells us in what sliding and slippery places we stand, and therefore had need still keep our watch about us, and not pour out our hearts upon such momentary pleasures. 3. We are as children in our advancements who, having found honey, eat too much. If the Lord did not thus sauce our dainties, how could we avoid the surfeit of them? Alas! how would we dote upon the world if we found nothing but prosperity, who are so set upon it for all the bitterness of it. 4. The Lord spies in us an unthankful disposition, who, when He honours us, and lifts us up that we might lift up His name and glory, we let the honour fall upon ourselves. III. GOD DOTH OFTEN TURN THE GREATEST DELIGHTS AND EARTHLY PLEASURES OF HIS SERVANTS TO THEIR GREATEST SORROW. 1. From the transitoriness of all outward comforts; here below there is never a gourd to cover our head, but a worm to consume it. And therefore what a man doth chiefly delight in the fruition, he must needs be most vexed in the separation and want of it. 2. From the naughty disposition of our hearts. (1) Hardness of heart which will not yield without such hard and smart strokes. (2) That we can turn all kind of comforts, natural and supernatural, to bewitching vanities, and yield them strength enough to allure us and draw us from the sound comfort of them; there is no ordinance, no creature, no gift, no comfort that can escape us. 3. From the jealousy of God who hath made all His creatures, ordinances, gifts, His servants as well as ours, and cannot abide that any of them should have any place but of servants with us; His zeal cannot abide that they should gain our hearts, or souls, or any power of them from Him, and therefore when men go a-whoring after the creatures, and lay the level of their comfort below the Lord Himself, then He shows the fervency of His zeal, either in removing the gift or them from the comfort of it. IV. ALL PROMISES TO GOD OR MAN LAWFUL AND IN OUR POWER MUST BE RELIGIOUSLY AND FAITHFULLY PERFORMED; OF ALL WHICH, THOU OPENETH THY MOUTH TO THE LORD, OR BEFORE THE LORD, THOU MAYEST NOT GO BACK. 1. I say, all lawful promises, for no promise may be a bond of iniquity, and the performance of such is but tying two sins together, as Herod tied to a wicked oath, murder of John Baptist. 2. All promises in our power, for nothing can tie us to impossibilities, as when the bishop makes the priest vow perpetual continency—a thing out of his power and reach. 3. To God or men. (1) To God (Num. xxx. 3). (2) To man; fidelity and veracity are of the weighty points of the law (Matt. xxiii. 23). And of the heathen given up to a reprobate sense it is said, they were truce-breakers (Rom. i. 30). 4. They must be performed religiously and faithfully. To a conscionable performance three things are required. (1) Perform them willingly and cheerfully; for God loves as a cheerful giver, so a cheerful performer. (2) Fully and wholly, not by halves (Num. xxx. 3). He shall do all that is gone out of His mouth, not taking away a part, as Ananias and Sapphira (Acts v.). (3) Without delay; every seasonable action is beautiful. Besides the express commandment (Eccles. v. 4). (*T. Taylor, D.D.*) *Different views held as to Jephthah's vow:*—Among Jewish paraphrasts and commentators, the more ancient are mostly of opinion that Jephthah did actually sacrifice his daughter. They censure the rashness of his vow, but they do not appear to doubt that the sacrifice of the maiden was actually made. Some later Jewish writers, however, of great authority, have contended that Jephthah's daughter was not slain, but devoted to a life of virginity; being shut up in a house which her father built for the purpose, and there visited four days in each year by the maidens of Israel as long as she lived. Among

Christian writers, perhaps all during the first ten centuries—certainly the exceptions, if any, were few and far between—believed that the maiden was sacrificed. Later Christian writers have not been so unanimous. Many, perhaps the majority, of those who have treated upon the subject, hold the opinion which, as we have seen, was universal in the early Church. Many others, of equal learning and eminence, have maintained that Jephthah's daughter was not offered by her father as a burnt-offering, but that she was permitted to live; among these, there are some who believe with the modern Jews just mentioned, that she was shut up by her father and devoted to a life of seclusion; while others suppose that she was devoted to the Lord's service in a life of celibacy, and was numbered during the remainder of her life with the "women who assemble at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation," performing duties of sacred service in connection with the worship at Shiloh. . . . That Jephthah was "hasty in opening his lips before God" is generally admitted; although this rashness is singularly in contrast with his cautiousness and skill in negotiating and arguing with the Ammonite, and shows how elements the most opposite may exist in the same character. That he deliberately contemplated as possible the sacrifice of a human being is a supposition scarcely to be entertained of one who is spoken of in the New Testament as a man of faith. Yet that human sacrifices were familiar to him cannot be doubted; and it is possible that familiarity with the rites of the Ammonites, on whose borders he dwelt, and with whom human sacrifices, as is now the case in many parts of Africa, were religious rites of daily occurrence, may have blunted his feelings, and have caused him to forget how odious such offerings were in the sight of God. The excitement of the occasion, however, seems to have bewildered him, so that he forgot everything not immediately connected with his forthcoming expedition. His vow was utterly rash. He did not take time to consider, for example, that if an ass or a dog had first met him coming out of his house on his return, to offer it to the Lord would have been an abomination. Had he bestowed that thought upon the matter which reason itself would teach us to be necessary when we open our lips to our Maker, he could not have failed to reflect that it was possible, nay, likely, that his only and beloved child would be the first to greet him on his return. It was natural that he should offer a vow to the Lord; strange that he should have done it with such impulsive rashness. . . . The peculiar expression of the sacred text, that "her father did with her according to his vow which he vowed, and she knew no man," may lend plausibility to the opinion, that she was devoted to a virgin life. But against this view there lie three objections, which, when taken together, compel us to adopt the opposite view. The first is, that a celibate life formed no part of her father's vow. The second is, that the great distance at which Jephthah was from Shiloh, where the tabernacle was, and the absence of any allusion in all his history to its existence, render the theory of his daughter being transferred thither improbable. The third is, that the misfortune of his birth would alone have prevented such an arrangement. If the sons of a bastard, according to the law of Moses, could not enter into the congregation of the Lord to the tenth generation, it is scarcely probable that Jephthah's daughter could have secured admission among the privileged women who rendered service about the tabernacle. We therefore look upon the maiden as having been sacrificed. Upon the gloom of this painful history, however, an ethereal brightness shines. What can be more beautiful, more wonderful, than this pure and lovely maid, brought up among bandits, and far from the tabernacle of God, thus freely and sweetly giving up herself as a thank-offering for the victories of Israel? And who can fail to see, in the story of the meek and self-sacrificing maid, "a marvellous and mysterious adumbration of a better sacrifice of another soul, of an only child, perfectly free and voluntary, and of virgin holiness and heavenly purity, the sacrifice of Christ, who gave His spotless soul to death for our sakes"? (*L. H. Wiseman, M.A.*)

Vers. 34–40. I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back.—*Retreat impossible*:—I. WHAT WE HAVE DONE. "I have opened my mouth unto the Lord." 1. We have opened our mouths before the Lord, first, "by confessing our faith in Jesus Christ." 2. We have also avowed and declared before the living God that we are Christ's disciples and followers. 3. We have opened our mouth to the Lord, next, because as we believe in Jesus Christ, and take Him to be our Master, so we "have admitted the Redeemer's claims to our persons and services, and have resolved to live for Him alone in our days." We have made a dedication

of ourselves to His service, declaring that we are not our own, but bought with a price. 4. We have cast in our lot with His people. II. WHAT WE CANNOT DO. "I cannot go back." Having once become Christians, we cannot apostatise from the faith. We cannot go back, even by temporary turnings aside. 1. If we did go back, we should show that we have been altogether false until now. 2. We should incur frightful penalties. To go back is death, shame, eternal ruin. 3. It would be so unreasonable. If you give up the religion of Jesus Christ, what other religion would you have? If you were to give up the pleasures of godliness, what other pleasures would you have? "Oh," says one, "we could go into the world." Could you? If you are a child of God you are spoiled for the world. 4. I have no inclination to go back. The man who is married to a good wife thinks to himself, "If I had to marry again to-morrow morning, she should be the bride, and happy would we be." And so, if we had our choice to make again, we would choose our dear Lord over again, only with much more eagerness and earnestness than we did at first. 5. We have opened our mouth to the Lord, and we cannot go back because we are so happy as we now are. A man does not turn his back upon that which has become his life and his joy; he is bound to it by the bliss which he derives from it. Can the Swiss forget his country when he listens to the home-music which he heard as a child amidst his native hills? Does not the home-sickness come over him so that he longs to be among the Alps again? Does not the Englishman, wherever he wanders, whether by land or sea, feel his heart instinctively turn to the white cliffs of Albion, and does he not say that with all her faults he loves his country still? Who would cease to be that which he loves to be? 6. And then, besides that, we cannot go back from what we have said, for Divine grace impels us onward. There is a secret power more mighty than all other forces called the force of grace, and this has captured us. III. SOMETHING WHICH WE MUST DO. If there is a present sacrifice demanded of us, we must make it directly. If there is anything in your business, and you cannot be a Christian if you do it, abjure it at once and for ever. If you are to do this, however, you must ask for more grace. One other admonition to Christian people is this—burn the boats behind you. When the Roman commander meant victory he landed his troops on the coast where he knew there were thousands of enemies, and he burned the boats, so as to cut off all chance of retreat. "But how are we to get away if we are beaten?" "That is just it," said he; "we will not be beaten; we will not dream of such a thing." "Burn the boats"—that is what you Christian people must do. "Make no provision for the flesh." Let the separation between you and the world be final and irreversible. Say, "Here I go for Christ and His Cross, for the truth of the Bible, for the laws of God, for holiness, for trust in Jesus; and never will I go back, come what may." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *No trifling with God*:—"We have opened our mouth unto the Lord." It is not what we promised the Church, though in becoming members of it we have promised to fulfil the mutual duties of Christians. It was not what we promised to the minister, though, in the very fact of becoming members of a Church of which he is the pastor we have a Christian duty towards him. It was not what we promised one another, though we all owe something to each other. But we have opened our mouth to the Lord. If a man must trifle, let him trifle with men, but not with God. If promises to men may be lightly broken—and they should not be—yet let us not trifle with promises made to God. And if solemn declarations ever can be forgotten—which they should not be—yet not solemn declarations made to God. Beware, oh! beware of anything like levity in entering into covenant with the Most High. (*Ibid.*) **Do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth.**—*A sacrifice of the world to high principle*:—Never in any age, or among any people, was there a more ready or thorough sacrifice of the world to high principle and duty than was made by the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite. It was made, too, in most trying circumstances. If ever the world seemed bright to her, it must have been when she went forth with timbrels and dances to meet her father. The land of Israel they had so longed for was to be their home—they were to dwell there in peace and honour, high in rank, great in power. It would seem to the daughter of Jephthah as if life were but beginning; the night seemed past and the morning breaking—a morning without a cloud. She could not but anticipate a long bright day for her father and herself; and it would be all the more welcome that they had sighed for it so often, and watched for it through a night so dark and so long. It was in these most trying circumstances that the daughter of Jephthah heard from her father's lips that he had opened his mouth unto the Lord and could not go back. Yet without one word of

reproach or complaint, and without hesitation, she said unto him who had vowed that rash vow, "My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the Lord, do to me," &c. Think of her, that child of an outcast—brought up in a heathen land and in a camp—think of her, how pure, how unworldly, how unselfish, how noble in spirit! Think of her patriotism, think of her self-sacrifice, that you may abhor all that is mean and selfish, and worldly and untruthful; and that you may cease to grudge the sacrifices your Father in heaven requires in love and wisdom, and for your own deliverance and safety. (*M. Nicholson, D.D.*) Let me alone two months, that I may . . . bewail my virginity.—*The wail of Jephthah's daughter* :—It is this wail of Jephthah's daughter that rises from every generation of this world's history. What we are all of us called upon to see with our own eyes, and judge with our own hearts, is a similar, or much more grievous waste of all that is good in human nature, of devotedness to country and family, of fine feeling, of the best intellect. Again and again, in our own society, we see the most splendid mental abilities squandered in the quest of what can never be discovered, the truest eloquence and highest moral feeling consecrated to a cause that is not worth lifting a finger to defend. Who has not seen the most precious human feelings wasted, you would say, on worthless people, while they might have fertilised and enriched responsive natures—the noblest devotedness sacrificed to a mere lie, or deception, or mockery? Two months was not too long to weep over the dreadful misguidedness of human actions, and the consequent waste or outward unprofitableness of what is best in human nature. Still, there is a compensating element even here. These companions who sympathised with their friend, and at last decked her as if for her bridal, and gave her into her father's hands, must no doubt have felt to the close of life that a world in which anything so tragic could happen was a blighted, melancholy world. Still, as they themselves passed through the various womanly duties that fell to them, and felt still the hold that event had taken; as they told the story of the noble maiden to their own children, and found how it moved and controlled them, and how many, through that example, were urged to more self-sacrificing deeds, and to higher thoughts about what is beautiful and good in life; must not these women sometimes have thought that possibly the real children of Jephthah's daughter, those who had truly succeeded to her nature, were more and better than could have been hers, had she lived? If then by family circumstances, or in any other way, we are called upon to sacrifice our own will to what seems a very needless, provoking, and rash plan, what we have to do is to seek to have something of the spirit of Jephthah's daughter, and accept our position without a murmur; knowing that, though we do not see how, any more than she did, this may, and will, by God's blessing, result in such development of our own character, and such enlargement of our usefulness, as could not otherwise be attained. (*Marcus Dods, D.D.*) Did with her according to his vow.—*Modern Jephthahs; or, parental immolations* :—In Jephthah's vow we see two things—1. A good feeling overcoming the judgment. 2. A sense of right leading to an enormous crime. I. JEPHTHAH SACRIFICED HIS DAUGHTER TO THE TRUE GOD. But what are many modern parents doing? Why, offering up their children to false gods! 1. The god of idleness. Indolence is ruin. 2. The god of worldliness. 3. The god of ambition. II. JEPHTHAH SACRIFICED ONLY THE BODY OF HIS DAUGHTER. But parents in these modern times are found immolating the souls of their children; they are made to prostrate their powers, and to yield the Divine sentiments of their nature to idleness, pelf, vanity, fashion. 1. Soul immolation is more gradual. 2. Soul immolation is more mischievous. It is the ruin of the whole man. III. JEPHTHAH SACRIFICED HIS DAUGHTER FROM A NOBLE IMPULSE. No such high feeling prompts parents in these days to sacrifice the souls of their children even to the false and ignominious divinities. They do it either from the spirit of custom, vanity, greed, or ambition. It is a cold-blooded, soulless immolation. If there is any feeling, it is the mere lust of the eye and pride of life. IV. JEPHTHAH SACRIFICED HIS DAUGHTER WITH A TERRIBLE REGRET. But modern parents lay the souls of their children on the altar of worldliness, vanity, and sin, not only without any compunction, but with an utter indifference. They see the souls of their daughters running into grubs, butterflies, swine, and heave no sigh of regret. V. JEPHTHAH SACRIFICED HIS DAUGHTER WITH HER FULL CONCURRENCE. Were worldly parents to say to their daughters at the dawn of their intelligent and moral life, "We intend to take all the innocency from your young loves—all the sensibility from your young consciences—all the religious poetry from your young natures—and to make you the dolls of fashion, the devotees of a sham life, the victims of a pampered

animalism, and thus rifle you of your birthright as immortals"—this would be honest; this would bring the question so thoroughly home to the young heart as would, we think, rouse opposition to the fiendish plan. (*Homilist.*) *The vow performed:*—To Jephthah and his daughter the vow was sacred, irrevocable. The deliverance of Israel by so signal and complete a victory left no alternative. It would have been well if they had known God differently; yet better this darkly impressive issue which went to the making of Hebrew faith and strength, than easy, unfruitful evasion of duty. We are shocked by the expenditure of fine feeling and heroism in upholding a false idea of God and obligation to Him; but are we outraged and distressed by the constant effort to escape from God which characterises our age? And have we for our own part come yet to the right idea of self and its relations? Our century, beclouded on many points, is nowhere less informed than in matters of self-sacrifice; Christ's doctrine is still uncomprehended. Jephthah was wrong, for God did not need to be bribed to support a man who was bent on doing his duty. And many fail now to perceive that personal development and service of God are in the same line. Life is made for generosity, not mortification; for giving in glad ministry, not for giving up in hideous sacrifice. It is to be devoted to God by the free and holy use of body, mind, and soul in the daily tasks which Providence appoints. The wailing of Jephthah's daughter rings in our ears, bearing with it the anguish of many a soul tormented in the name of that which is most sacred, tormented by mistakes concerning God, the awful theory that He is pleased with human suffering. The relics of that hideous Moloch worship which polluted Jephthah's faith, not even yet purged away by the Spirit of Christ, continue and make religion an anxiety and life a kind of torture. I do not speak of that devotion of thought and time, eloquence and talent to some worthless cause which here and there amazes the student of history and human life—the passionate ardour, for example, with which Flora Macdonald gave herself up to the service of a Stuart. But religion is made to demand sacrifices compared to which the offering of Jephthah's daughter was easy. The imagination of women especially, fired by false representations of the death of Christ, in which there was a clear Divine assertion of self, while it is made to appear as complete suppression of self, bears many on in a hopeless and essentially immoral endeavour. Has God given us minds, feelings, right ambitions, that we may crush them? Does He purify our desires and aspirations by the fire of His own Spirit and still require us to crush them? Are we to find our end in being nothing, absolutely nothing, devoid of will, of purpose, of personality? Is this what Christianity demands? Then our religion is but refined suicide, and the God who desires us to annihilate ourselves is but the Supreme Being of the Buddhists, if those may be said to have a god who regard the suppression of individuality as salvation. Christ was made a sacrifice for us. Yes; He sacrificed everything except His own eternal life and power; He sacrificed ease and favour and immediate success for the manifestation of God. So He achieved the fulness of personal might and royalty. And every sacrifice His religion calls us to make is designed to secure that enlargement and fulness of spiritual individuality in the exercise of which we shall truly serve God and our fellows. Does God require sacrifice? Yes, unquestionably—the sacrifice which every reasonable being must make in order that the mind, the soul may be strong and free, sacrifice of the lower for the higher, sacrifice of pleasure for truth, of comfort for duty, of the life that is earthly and temporal for the life that is heavenly and eternal. And the distinction of Christianity is that it makes this sacrifice supremely reasonable because it reveals the higher life, the heavenly hope, the eternal rewards for which the sacrifice is to be made, that it enables us in making it to feel ourselves united to Christ in a Divine work which is to issue in the redemption of mankind. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*) *Jephthah's payment of his vow*:—Jephthah paid his vow. At a frightful sacrifice he gave up what he had promised. When he gave up his daughter he gave up his all. Did Jephthah open his mouth unto the Lord? and have not you who are parents—have not you dedicated your children to the Lord, and vowed that they shall be His? Not rashly, not hastily, but with due deliberation you did so, and that in a holy ordinance appointed by God for the very purpose. Your vow is registered in heaven; is it to be forgotten on earth? You have opened your mouth unto the Lord; will you go back? God asks your children to be presented to Him not as slain, but living sacrifices. You have vowed; are you paying your vows? Do you pray for your children? Do you teach them to pray? Do you speak to them of God and of Jesus, and lead them in the way of holiness? And when your vows

require that you should exercise discipline, and when faithfulness to God requires that you should lay upon your children what for the present is not joyous but grievous, do you shrink from it? To spare your feelings, do you shrink from it? Oh, remember Jephthah when you are thus tempted; and think, if you were under such a vow as he was, how you would act. And you children, think of Jephthah's daughter. Let her spirit take possession of you. Think how she lived above her own personal and selfish interests; think how she honoured her father and honoured God. (*M. Nicholson, D.D.*) "*Did with her according to his vow*":—If he did not offer her as a burnt-offering, then he did not do with her according to the vow. Moreover, why all this wailing and anguish if, after all, all that was going to happen to her is what happens to thousands who seem to stand in little need of compassion? Then, again, why did she ask for the one favour of a respite of two months to bewail her virginity, if she was to have thirty or forty years with leisure for that purpose? And, lastly, if the mere fact of her remaining unmarried fulfilled even that part of the vow which specified that she was to be the Lord's, then what objection can we make to other young women giving themselves to the Lord in the same way? If Jephthah's daughter became a nun, and if this was judged a fulfilment of his vow, if by being a virgin she was somehow more the Lord's than by being a married woman, a stronger foundation need not be sought for the establishment of nunneries. (*Marcus Dods, D.D.*) *Vows which should not be kept*:—Two men are very foolish or stubborn who fulfil an agreement which they both see to be disadvantageous, and wish to fall away from. No duty whatever compels them to fulfil it, and if they do so they are justly the laughing-stock of their acquaintances. Now, this is precisely the case in which a man finds himself who has vowed to God what turns out to be sinful, for God can never wish him to fulfil a contract which, he now sees, involves sin. A man swears to do a certain thing because he thinks it will be pleasing to God, but if he discovers that, instead of being pleasing, it will be hateful to God, to perform his vow, and do that vowed but hateful thing, is to insult God. By the very discovery of the sinfulness of a vow, the maker of it is absolved from performing it. God shrinks much more than he can do from the perpetration of sin. Both parties fall from the agreement. (*Ibid.*) *Typical aspect of Jephthah's vow*:—See in the tragic tale a foreshadowing of the Cross of our Lord Christ. He took upon Himself our human nature, and having vowed it as the ransom of the guilty world He never hesitated, despite the awful cost, to keep His vow. Gladly did He make voluntary oblation of His own spotless humanity, a vicarious sacrifice to set the whole race free from the spiritual children of Ammon, the followers of the evil one. That it was a costly sacrifice He offered we know full well from the story of Gethsemane; nevertheless He did only cry, "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt," then held His peace. Do we think it is true that He bewailed His virginity with His fellows on the mountains before His death? Yet we know that from the human standpoint our Lord's ministry of three years and a half was almost fruitless. Multitudes followed Him to see His miracles; they crowded about Him bringing their sick folk to be healed; but they did not become His disciples, and accept heartily His Word. To His human nature this must ever have been a grief and sore trial. Once He said to the Twelve, "Will ye also go away?" We know that not even His own relations believed on Him. (*Arthur Ritchie.*)

CHAPTER XII.

VERS. 1–3. **Wherefore passedst thou over to fight against the children of Ammon, and didst not call us to go with thee?**—*Shams and frauds*:—Though these Ephraimites are long since dead and gone, there are many Ephraimites alive. They are men who will not share the conflict themselves, but are angry when others succeed. I. THERE ARE PEOPLE STILL WHO THINK NOTHING CAN BE DONE WITHOUT THEM. We find these people everywhere—not a few of them at home. Ask that busy, bustling housewife to take her children out into the country for a day; or ask her to attend church on a Sunday morning; or ask her to give a few hours to visiting among the sick and the poor and the sorrowful, what will she say? "How can I leave my house? Who will attend to my affairs? If I were out of

that house a few days it would all go to ruin." That woman has grown daughters who could and would gladly see to things if she would only let them. But she goes on in her foolish whim that nothing can be done without her. And I verily believe that not a few would rather have nothing done at all if they could not do it. In business, too, the same thing occurs. There are men who are slaves to their business. Neither their sons nor their confidential men, who would suffer any loss rather than neglect the governor's interest, can be trusted. They must see to it, or it won't be done. Some day God puts such a man on his back. He is away six months with a serious illness. His sons, who have not been thought capable hitherto, have responsibility thrown upon them, and rise to the position. The man is humbled, shamed, or it may be, delighted to find that the business has done better with the infusion of the new blood than it did with the old. The Church of Christ, unfortunately, is afflicted with a large number of men who think nothing can be done without them. There are men who would rather the battle should be lost than others win it—who would almost wish that evil should remain rather than others have the honour of removing it. But what does it matter who gains the victory if it be gained? God can accomplish His purposes without any of us. Look over the pages of history, and you will find that workers fall, but the work goes on. II. THERE ARE SOME WHO, THOUGH THEY CAN'T STOP THE WORK, TRY TO PREJUDICE THE WORKERS. The men of the text said in effect, "And who are you? You are fugitives, mongrels, not of pure blood. What business have the likes of you to think you can fight the foes of Israel? It is monstrous, and we won't have it." The same thing goes on to-day. There are men who seem to think they have said something clever and settling when they say that the popular useful man was not born in a palace. "Who's he?" is their cry. "Why, don't you know that he was a collier, and worked in a coal pit? His father died in a cottage. His mother was the daughter of a man who drove a horse and cart, and never had five pounds in his life." And what of that? Is it not honest to get coal? Better be a collier and dig coal in the service of man, and thus the service of God, than be a loafer, an idler, a consumer, a drone. Some of the noblest of God's servants have come from among the poor, and the obscure, and the unknown. Our Lord Himself was a toiler, and the Son of toilers, and has for ever consecrated and blessed all honest necessary human labour. So I say to you all, toil on, pray on, fight on, win victories for God. Beat back the enemies of Israel; and if the Ephraimites, lacking courage and genius themselves, despise you, let them. III. THERE ARE SOME WHO CAN'T OR WON'T DO MUCH THEMSELVES, BUT HATE, AND SCORN, AND TRY TO PERSECUTE THOSE WHO DO. "We will burn thine house upon thee." Alas! this has often found expression in the bitterness of party strife and religious bigotry. Unable to silence men whose lips God had touched as with live coals from His own altar, and whose hearts had felt the power of the living God, they have erected their stakes, piled their faggots, and lit their fires, in which the saints of God, the excellent of the earth, have stood till their flesh was shrivelled and their bones cindered. "We will burn thine house upon thee with fire," said these men; but they found themselves unable to do it. Some men are hard to kill, and some houses bad to burn. Many a tyrant has found this out. "We will burn thine house upon thee." It does not seem to have occurred to these cowardly Ephraimites that men who burn other people's houses sometimes burn themselves. It is dangerous to play with edged tools. It is not safe to toy with fire. It may become the instrument of your own torture, the weapon of your own destruction. "They that take the sword shall perish with the sword," said Jesus Christ; and there is for us no higher authority. Some men who are fond of using fire do no harm except to themselves. Whilst it is in some sense only right and just that this should be so, there are cases in which we are sorry for the opposers. Well had it been for these Ephraimites had they shared in the universal rejoicing. Well had it been for them if they had learned wisdom, and ceased from opposition. Their wicked and senseless opposition brought ruin upon themselves. In sheer self-defence the victor turned the sword upon them. Alas for them! Forty and two thousand of them that day left their dead bodies upon the plains as victims of their folly, and in illustration of our saying that the wicked often injure themselves. And this is true with the Lord Jesus and His gospel. Some men oppose it, reject it, mutilate it, burn it. All such injure themselves. They can never hurt the truth. It will live. They cannot stop the power of Jesus Christ to save men. The waves of the ocean dash against the granite rock, but the rock does not move. But what of the waves? Broken, they roll back in spray to the ocean out of

which they came. "Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder." (*C. Leach, D.D.*)

Ver. 6. **Say now Shibboleth: and he said Sibboleth:**—*Trifles indicate character:*—It is often just such a slight peculiarity which identifies men as belonging to a certain district or family. You know whose son a man is by some motion of his hands or by his walk, by the fall of a lock of hair or the way he lifts his eye: so also some very slight peculiarity in our conduct or conversation is a sufficient index to our whole state. In our Lord's account of the last judgment He describes all men as expressing astonishment that they should be so summarily dealt with, should be allotted to their irrevocable destinies on grounds apparently so trivial. Is it really reasonable that for some trifle of this kind a man should be everlastingly damned, irretrievably and once for all cast in judgment? You will think that it is quite reasonable if, in the light of this incident, you consider that the little things a man does or neglects to do are infallible symptoms of his character. These Ephraimites were not slain because the Gileadites thought it a heinous crime to drop the "h"; but their blood dyed the Jordan because it was Ephraimite blood, and this was manifested by their little peculiarity. And so in a thousand ways that God observes, and that even men of any spiritual insight or keenness of observation notice, we are in little things revealing our character, and in the final judgment one of these little things will be sufficient to condemn us. Try to put away these little faults; if you succeed, then you are safe. But the faults of your character, the little actions that truly express what is in you, you cannot so easily put off. There often arise circumstances even in this life in which a more holy and decided character than we possess were most desirable: we could pass through what has come upon us in a vastly more satisfactory way if only we were other kind of men than we are; but this is impossible. These Ephraimites could not for the nonce become Gileadites; nor for their life could they make that little change in their mode of speech. And so we cannot, on the sudden, change ourselves. If certain little things about you make you suspect you belong to the wrong tribe; if there are little flaws in your conduct which you find it extremely hard to remove, and which hint to you that perhaps or probably the very roots of your character are wrong; then go quickly to God, for you have but this one resource and way of escape, and offer to forsake your old tribe, to be born again, and beseech His grace to effect in you a thorough and real change of heart, such as He has effected in many. (*Marcus Dods, D.D.*) *Shibboleth:*—That the language of Palestine was diversely spoken in its different provinces in the days of Christ, is evident from the ready recognition of Peter by the high priest's servant as a Galilean, his "speech betraying him." In the present day the Arabic of one part of Syria is so different from that of another, that a person well able to understand the people of Smyrna finds great difficulty in understanding those of Aleppo; and even in the small island of Malta, where a corrupt Arabic is spoken, the peasants of the several villages are said to be nearly unintelligible to each other. Our own country affords ample illustration. A vanquished army of Northumbrians, retreating across the Tees, might with equal facility be detected by being required to say the word "river," as were the Ephraimites on the banks of the Jordan by being required to say the word "shibboleth," or "stream." As our Northumbrians cannot pronounce the "r," but utter instead of it a guttural sound resembling a "w," the Ephraimites, unable to pronounce the "sh," discovered themselves at once by their saying sibboleth for shibboleth; and so fierce was the revenge of those whom they had taunted, that the blood of forty-two thousand men mingled with the stream of the Jordan. In this tragical scene the vindictive fury of the men of Gilead cannot escape heavy censure. They had been exasperated by bitter words; but in this, as in many other instances in history, we see the terrific madness of popular revenge. No contentions are so bitter as those which arise among brethren: "A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city." Civil wars are usually carried on under greater exasperation of feeling than wars between nations of a different race; nor is the breach, when once made, so readily healed. As the sweetest wine, when acetous fermentation has set in, turns to the sourest vinegar, so it is in families and in Churches. How dismally protracted are some family feuds! And how embittered against each other are the adherents of the two opposed parties in a riven Church! Let us not be too prodigal of our anathemas upon these cruel Gileadites at the fords of the Jordan, at least until we have taken leisure to compare the mutual aspect of civilised nations, and the mutual

aspect of Christian Churches, in the later centuries, when a conduct so much less violent might have been expected. Are there not Church parties in our own day which set up shibboleths of their own, and refuse the interchanges of brotherhood to all who do not pronounce the test-word in precisely the same manner as themselves? (*L. H. Wiseman, M.A.*) *Shibboleth:*—The word on which this tragical occurrence hangs has passed into a proverbial word. Were any casual reader of Scripture asked what the word signifies, he would hardly reply, a stream or flood. The incident mentioned in the text has given a new meaning to it. Shibboleth is now an English word, with an English meaning distinct from its root. It means any word, doctrine, form, or fashion which, whether we will or no, whether rightly or wrongly, justly or unjustly, we are required to pronounce or agree to as a test, in short, which is intended to try on whose side we wage war, whose leadership we acknowledge, whose dominions we belong to. There are God's shibboleths and man's. "Except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven." "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." "No man can say that Jesus is the Christ, except by the Holy Ghost." There are also man's shibboleths. "You must believe that the world stands still while the sun revolves." "No," said the wise old man, "I cannot believe that, for I have discovered a new system." "Then you must die, and your soul be lost." So the poor discoverer was tortured into pronouncing the shibboleth of human ignorance. Notice, as a leading truth, that all are not Israel that are of Israel. However much we may speak, dress, and look alike, there is a hidden difference which time or a severe test will show. Also that difference may sound trifling, and yet be of such importance as to embrace the life or death of the soul. Also we may live in the same land, the same street, the same village, the same house; may fight in the same camp, and wear the same uniform; and yet be part Ephraimites and part Gileadites; part God's people and part Satan's; part hastening to destruction and part in a state of safety. The sight of any great swaying and swelling multitude, any waving ocean of humanity, causes many a quiet thought, and sorrow, and prayer to ascend from Christian souls, respecting the divided future of the ofttimes unanimous-looking crowd. For a Christian may lament and pray for his brother, without lapsing into the Pharisee's censoriousness. I. LOOK WE NOW FOR THE VAIN SHIBBOLETHS OF MAN, those heavy burdens which are laid on men's shoulders, and laid too often by those who will not themselves touch them with the tips of their fingers. 1. "I believe that I am forgiven." This is one of the unfair shibboleths required by man. Seldom a saint departs without a sight of the broad seal of God's forgiveness. But he may be afraid to take it. Still he is forgiven. To be forgiven is of the first importance. To know we are forgiven is of importance too; but not indispensable. 2. "I am a member of this Church." Here is another human shibboleth. The Lord will not ask what earthly Church—so it be but a branch of Christ's vine—a soul belongs to. "Come with us and we will do thee good," is the utmost length to which our invitation may go. 3. "I understand Scripture in the literal sense. I agree to no new interpretation. I admit no light from science." These requirements form another human shibboleth; this shutting up of the Bible from that free, and full, and fair inquiry, which, if it were afraid of it, it would be well nigh worthless. Having first prayed reverently, "Lead me not, O Father, into temptation," a man may wear away his Bible by the daily attrition of diligent study; for it contains what no study can wear down—the very truth of God. Such a reader Christ smiles upon as his fingers turn over the sacred page. For such a man, after God's own heart, the Holy Spirit will strike forth new discoveries; will lead such an one by still waters, and feed him in pleasant pastures, far away from the rivers of Babylon; will guide such an one into all truth, and save his soul in peace. II. THERE ARE ALSO SOME TRUE SHIBBOLETHS OF GOD, WHICH WE MUST PRONOUNCE WITH A FULL, ROUND UTTERANCE, OR WE ARE LOST. 1. Repentance. "If I were to die in the pulpit," said Philip Henry, "I would desire to die preaching repentance; and if I were to die out of the pulpit, I would desire to die practising repentance." "Except ye repent," says the Holy Spirit, "ye shall all likewise perish." Can we say, "shibboleth"? Have we repented? Or is it only the "sibboleth" of a worldly sorrow? 2. Another shibboleth of God is faith in Christ. Not the form of words, "I believe"; but the diligent, faithful life; the earnest, converted soul. 3. We must believe the Bible to be inspired. Reverently and freely interpreting it, we must take it from God's gracious hand, and follow out its leading as the clue to salvation. Else it will hang like a millstone about our necks, and sink us to perdition. 4. We

must learn the true language of heaven, the true ways of holiness. We must leave the lispings, formalities, and affectations of the world, and say, "Shibboleth," as the angels and spirits of the just, and the just who yet live upon earth say it, and have said it before. (*S. B. James, M.A.*) *Sectarianism—its origin, evils, cures:*—The Church of God is divided into a great number of denominations, some of them founded by very good men, some of them founded by very egotistic men, and some of them founded by very bad men. But as I demand liberty of conscience for myself, I must give that same liberty to every other man, remembering that he no more differs from me than I differ from him. I advocate the largest liberty in all religious belief and form of worship. The air and the water keep pure by constant circulation, and I think there is a tendency in religious discussion to purification and moral health. In a world of such tremendous vicissitude and temptation, and with a soul that must after a while stand before a throne of insufferable brightness, to give account for every thought, word, action, preference, and dislike—that man is mad who has no religious preference. But our early education, our physical temperament, our mental constitution, will very much decide our form of worship. 1. In tracing out the religion of sectarianism, or bigotry, I find that a great deal of it comes from wrong education in the home circle. There are parents who do not think it wrong to caricature and jeer the peculiar forms of religion in the world, and denounce other denominations. 2. I think sectarianism and bigotry also rise from too great prominence of any one denomination in a community. All the other denominations are wrong, and his denomination is right, because his denomination is the most wealthy, or the most popular, and it is "our" Church, and "our" religious organisation, and "our" choir, and "our" minister, and the man tosses his head, and wants other denominations to know their places. 3. Bigotry is often the child of ignorance. You seldom find a man with large intellect who is a bigot. It is the man who thinks he knows a great deal, but does not. That man is almost always a bigot. There is nothing that will so soon kill bigotry as sunshine—God's sunshine. So I have set before you what I consider to be the causes of bigotry. What are some of the baleful effects? 1. It cripples investigation. You are wrong, and I am right, and that ends it. No taste for exploration, no spirit of investigation. 2. Another great damage done by the sectarianism and bigotry of the Church is, that it disgusts people with the Christian religion. Now, the Church of God was never intended for a war barrack. 3. Again, bigotry and sectarianism do great damage in the fact that they hinder the triumph of the gospel. Oh! how much wasted ammunition! how many men of splendid intellect have given their whole life to controversial disputes, when, if they had given their life to something practical, they might have been vastly useful! A quarrel in a beehive is a strange sight. I go out sometimes in the summer and I find two beehives, and these two beehives are in a quarrel. I come near enough, not to be stung, but I come just near enough to hear the controversy, and one beehive says, "That field of clover is the sweetest," and another beehive says, "That field of clover is the sweetest." I come in between them, and I say, "Stop this quarrel; if you like that field of clover best, go there; if you like that field of clover best, go there; but let me tell you that that hive which gets the most honey is the best hive!" So I come out between the Churches of the Lord Jesus Christ. One denomination of Christians says, "That field of Christian doctrine is best," and another says, "This field of Christian doctrine is best." Well, I say, "Go where you get the most honey." That is the best Church which gets the most honey of Christian grace for the heart, and the most honey of Christian usefulness for the life. Besides that, if you want to build up any denomination, you will never build it up by trying to pull some other down. In England a law was made against the Jew. England thrust back the Jew, and thrust down the Jew, and declared that no Jew should hold official position. What came of it? Were the Jews destroyed? Was their religion overthrown? No. Intolerance never yet put down anything. Now, what is the remedy for sectarianism? I think we may overthrow the severe sectarianism and bigotry in our hearts, and in the Church also, by realising that all the denominations of Christians have yielded noble institutions and noble men. There is nothing that so stirs my soul as this thought. Moreover, we may also overthrow the feelings of severe sectarianism by joining other denominations in Christian work. Perhaps I might more forcibly illustrate this truth by calling your attention to an incident which took place some years ago. One Monday morning, at about two o'clock, while her nine hundred passengers were

sound asleep dreaming of home, the steamer *Atlantic* crashed into Mars Head. Five hundred souls in ten minutes landed in eternity! Oh, what a scene! Agonised men and women running up and down the gangways, and clutching for the rigging, and the plunge of the helpless steamer, threw two continents into terror. But see this brave quartermaster pushing out with the life-line until he gets to the rock; and see these fishermen gathering up the shipwrecked, and taking them into the cabins and wrapping them in the flannels snug and warm; and see that minister of the gospel, with three other men, getting into a lifeboat, and pushing out for the wreck, pulling away across the surf, and pulling away until they saved one more man, and then getting back with him to the shore. Can these men ever forget that night? And can they ever forget their companionship in peril, companionship in struggle, companionship in awful catastrophe and rescue? Never! Never! Well, our world has gone into a worse shipwreck. Sin drove it on the rocks. The old ship has lurched and tossed in the tempests of six thousand years. Out with the life-line! I do not care what denomination carries it. Out with the life-boat! I do not care what denomination rows it. Side by side, in the memory of common hardships, and common trials, and common prayers, and common tears, let us be brothers for ever. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *Social and religious tests*:—I. SOCIAL LIFE HAS ITS SHIBBOLETHS. Goodness of heart and purity of life and language are not always the tests of admission to what is termed choice society. Anything before that. With some it is education. How much do you know? With others it is elegance of manners and accomplishments. We do not admit awkward people to our company. And some estimate the worth of their neighbours by the length of their purses. How much are you worth? With multitudes dress is the countersign. The idol of fashion is set up, and we are expected to bow down daily and offer devout homage. In many assemblies the garment decides the position. One of our great generals, it is said, went modestly to one of our fashionable churches on a great funeral occasion. Upon his applying for a place, it transpired that the plain cloak which wrapped his person was barely sufficient to gain him a seat inside the door. It was almost literally, "Stand thou there." During the service the cloak fell back far enough to reveal the mark upon the shoulders. Then came most profuse apologies, with the pressing invitation, "Come up higher, and sit thou in a good place." II. RELIGIOUS LIFE HAS ITS SHIBBOLETHS, and there is no place where the overbearing requirements are more unseemly or more to be deprecated. The spirit of Christianity, as taught by its Divine Author, is a spirit of kindness, tenderness, forbearance. It commends and enjoins the charity that beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things. In the gospel we are to make allowance for each other's differences, and bear with each other's infirmities, and bid God-speed to each other's efforts. There are shibboleths which are legitimate, and essential to the maintenance of vital truth and goodness among men. There are principles which constitute the very foundation stones of God's temple. These are to be defended and guarded without compromise. It is not our measuring line which is thus applied; it is not our standard set up; it is not our speech to which conformity is required. It is the pronunciation which God demands. And yet it becomes us to be extremely cautious in the pressing of the pass-words, lest we should substitute our own pronunciation for God's and shut out any of the children of the kingdom. "Take heed lest ye offend one of these little ones." There are different phases of the same doctrine; there are various explanations and interpretations which do not invalidate the truth. (*Goyn Talmage.*) *The shibboleths of the Churches*:—We may learn here the worth of the essence of a thing as it stands in contrast with the mere accent—something like that which Paul set forth in the noble words I read—and the need there is now, as there was then, that we shall stand free if we can from the letter and cling to the spirit. The letter may be, as it often is, the mere difference between the two sides, while the spirit is the Divine reality that lies and abides within them both, the only thing God ever did care for, as I believe, or ever will care for while the world stands. Shibboleth and sibboleth, you know, still make mischief when they can get a chance, as surely as they did on the banks of the Jordan, and they fall out, and divide, and weaken all the chances of right against wrong. Let others fall out as they will about the way to say the word, but be sure that the gates of life never did open and never can to this mere turn of the tongue, this sesame, but only to the grand old password: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul and mind and strength, and thy neighbour as thyself." I notice, again, when I bring shibboleth

and sibboleth home to my heart and life, that there is no other way open to me if I would be a man, let alone a Christian, but just to say what he says, the good apostle (1 Cor. xii. 13). Our belief is far less a matter of free-will than we imagine. If we are sincere in regard to truth we must believe as we do, and there is no ground for reviling. And as oaks grow best alone, and as vines need a standard, and as some flowers like a day with three quarters shadow, and others want all the sunshine that heaven can pour upon them; as all the fruits in Covent Garden Market to-morrow will be better than any one of them; as all herbs are good in their place, sweet and bitter, mellow and sharp; and as some love Rembrandt's pictures with their deep shadows, and some Raphael's, with their floods of glory and hosts of angels, and no great gallery could be complete if you leave out any of these great masters: so I think we must make up our minds that any Church which can include all these diversities of thinking and believing is better than those which leave any out, and breed "in and in," like the chickens in Hawthorne's story that were so careful of the separateness of their breed that there were only two of them left in the end, and they could do nothing but croak. We cannot always think alike or believe alike in the most sacred relations that men and women can sustain to each other in their homes; and we ought not to look for any finer harmony than the holy spirit of well-mated Christian people, least of all in the Churches where this bond of fellowship is maintained, against all comers, that every man may make something good enough for heaven out of the nature that God has given him and the life he has to live, and that the best form in the Churches and in the nation is that in which men can manage wisely and well to govern themselves. (*R. Collyer, D.D.*)

Vers. 13–15. **Abdon . . . had forty sons and thirty nephews.**—*The time of peace:* —For our instruction this we may learn, that in the time of peace, when there is freedom from war and persecution in a land, there is great prosperity in every kind, as multitudes of people, building, purchasing, and growing in wealth and promotion. For though the plague and famine sometimes sweep away and diminish the number of people, yet they through God's goodness not continuing long, nor sore, are the sooner outgrown; but the other, I mean war and persecution, make strip and waste, as we say, even as the violent fire burneth all where it cometh, and the raging waters drown. But when they cease, there is plenty for the most part going with peace, and there is with both great outward prosperity. Which is to be acknowledged a singular great favour of God, and to such as are able to use it aright it giveth much liberty and encouragement to live well and happily. And otherwise what is all jollity and abundance, if we have not learned and be not fitted for the right use of it? The which how few regard or look after, but only seek to pass their precious time in ease, vanity, play, idleness, drinking and such like; and the civiller sort to mind little else than to increase and gather wealth, the most of them not knowing why, but to content and please themselves thereby; to see how fondly, nay madly, so many do use this peace and liberty of quiet living, it is much more to be bewailed than the benefit itself is to be rejoiced for. And to think how in this time of peace good preaching should be in use throughout all parts of the land to hold down atheism, profaneness, and other sin, and that which should be all in all with us to bring many people to God, and yet how little is done this way, it cannot without much bewailing be thought on. Now if in this earthly mansion of ours He can allow His people so liberal and comfortable a supply of earthly refreshings meet for them, until they shall no longer stand in need of them; then what is like to be their entertainment at home in heaven, and what provision will the Lord make for them there, where all sound rejoicing is without end or measure? A great means to provoke them to serve out their time with cheerfulness and faithfulness when they consider that all things are theirs, both here and hereafter. All good things serve to make up the happiness of them who are Christ's, who is Lord of all. (*R. Rogers.*)

CHAPTER XIII.

Vers. 1–25. **Manoah; and his wife.**—*The angelic appearances to Manoah and his wife:*—I. The unknown visitor. Manoah's wife was just the woman to be visited by an angel—bold, energetic, large-hearted, believing. God's gifts are regulated in their extent by our capacity for receiving them. We should have diviner visitations

if we were fitted for them, or could appreciate them. II. THE FEARFUL INFERENCE. We never get into the presence of the supernatural, but we are ready to say, "Let not God speak with us, or we die." Whence comes this universal dread of God? I have seen a cross with the image of the dead Christ; the cross in the midst of nature's fairest scenes, telling of sin, of suffering, of death. So there is always with us, in the midst of life's engagements and joys, the shadow or the memory of some sin or sorrow. When God comes to a man, and separates him from other men the man feels, and confesses the sinfulness of his sin, and at first thinks he shall surely die. When God comes to us in His dispensations, when by a touch He causes our flesh to wither, when He removes friends, or strips us of property, we are filled with fear. It is only the sight of God in Christ "reconciling the world unto Himself," the revelation of God in sacrifice, that can calm our minds and quiet our fears. III. THE CONCLUSIVE ARGUMENT. It is the woman's: with her finer perceptions and keener senses, she sees the truth as by intuition—she does not arrive at the conclusion by the processes of an argument, she is guided by her emotional nature. There are some minds that possess the gift of seeing into the meaning of things, and instantly arriving at definite conclusions. We do not know how to construct an argument in reference to the Divine procedure; we are not sufficiently impressed by the past to infer the future; we need spiritual perceptions to see the real truth of spiritual things, and the intuitions of the heart may be left to help the judgment in its interpretations. If God has been at such pains to save us, then surely we shall not be left to perish. If there is a sacrifice for sin, then, sinners as we are, we may be saved through faith in Him "whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation." We are not left without Divine manifestations. Christ has come, and has gone up again to heaven. Are we left without any manifestations of God? There are spiritual revelations for spiritual men. God does come to true and loving hearts. Love will always come to commune with love. (*H. J. Bevis.*) *Manoah and his wife: the representatives of two great prevalent moral states of mind in relation to God*:—I. A GLOOMY DREAD. This dread of God, which is all but universal—1. Is an abnormal state of the soul. Antecedently it is impossible to believe that the God of infinite goodness would create beings to dread Him, and the revelations of His love and loveliness in nature prove that they are made to admire and adore Him. Whence came this dread, then? It springs from a sense of guilt. 2. Explains atheism. A desire to ignore and forget and destroy if possible the being we dread is natural. Because men dread God they do not like to retain Him in their thoughts. 3. Is the source of all blasphemous theologies. The being we dread, by the law of mind, we invest with the attributes of a monster. Much of our popular theology presents a God before whom the human heart cowers with horror and recoils with alarm. 4. Keeps the soul away from Him. We shrink from the object we dread, we turn our backs from such an one and hasten from his very shadow. 5. Reveals the necessity of Christ's mission. With this dread in the human soul virtue and happiness are impossible. But how can it be removed? Only by such an appearance of God to the soul as we have in the all-loving tenderness of Christ. In Him God comes to man and says, "It is I, be not afraid." II. A CHEERING HOPE. The woman's hope was based upon an interpretation of God's dealing with them, and this indeed is a certain ground of hope. How has God dealt with us? "If the Lord were pleased to kill us"—1. Would He have in our natures endowed us with such powers for enjoyment, and placed us in a world so full of blessedness and beauty? 2. Would He have continued our existence so long in such a world, notwithstanding all our transgressions? 3. Would He have sent His only begotten Son into the world to effect our salvation? 4. Would He have given us the gospel, the ministry, and all the morally restorative influences at work within us? (*Homilist.*) *God and His people*:—I. WE MAY LEARN THE LOVING FORETHOUGHT OF GOD FOR HIS PEOPLE. He never wounds them without at the same time making provision for their healing. Their emancipation may be only partial in the present; but it is certain in the future to be gloriously complete. The agents for bringing it about are in the counsels and resources of the Most High. II. PARENTS MAY LEARN THE RIGHT METHOD OF TRAINING THEIR CHILDREN FOR FUTURE SERVICE IN THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD (ver. 8). God's teaching is necessary for the great and difficult work; and God's teaching should be asked for and followed. III. WE MAY LEARN THAT EMINENT SERVICE FOR GOD IS ALLIED TO EMINENT CONSECRATION TO GOD. We must become Nazarites in the spiritual sense; and the measure of our usefulness will depend on the measure of our consecration. IV. WE MAY LEARN THE DUTY OF HOPEFULNESS IN THE MIDST OF ALL DARKNESS AND PERPLEXITY (ver. 23). The bright

hopefulness of Manoah's wife rested on a solid foundation. But as believers in Christ we have even better grounds for looking with bright hopefulness in reference to every threatening visitation of Divine Providence. God has given to us richer tokens of His love (Rom. viii. 32). (*Thomas Kirk.*) **How shall we order the child.**—*Education of children:*—The proper idea of educating children is to fit them for the duties of life, and the realities of a fast-coming eternity. To do this they must be trained. 1. Training combines both instruction and government. Its field is both the mind and the body. To train a child requires patience, faith, courage, perseverance, and Divine assistance. 2. To bring up a child in "the nurture and admonition of the Lord," instruction and example are essential. It is the nature of a child to imitate what is around it. Influences educate the child long before it is large enough to be sent from home to school. Let the home be for amusement, pleasure, knowledge, and religion as attractive as possible. 3. In the bringing up of children prayer, deep, earnest, believing prayer is essential. After all our solicitude and painstaking, and watching, and heart-bleeding, we have to trust them to God. (*W. A. Scott, D.D.*) *Money bequeathed by parents to their children:*—It comes out incidentally, but not the less certainly, in the teaching of the Lord, that parents are in some matters naturally capable of making the best choice for their offspring (Luke xi. 13). Although they are evil, there are some things in which they can act aright. If the question relate to the kind of food that should be given to his child—whether a piece of bread or a stone, whether a fish or a serpent—the man is capable of judging. When a parent looks forward and attempts to provide for the future of his child, he is more at a loss than in the matter of choosing what food should be given to a hungry infant. It is when a man is called to do for his offspring what the lower creatures cannot do, that he most signally fails. He is insufficient for these things. Of the many influences which bear on the child's wellbeing, and which the parent may in some measure control, I select only one. I limit the question to one object, and read it, How shall we order the child in regard to money? The estimate, the acquisition, the possession, the use, the loss of money, have a very material influence on the character, and station, and happiness of our children, in youth and onward to age. In these, as in other matters, parents have much in their power. By their method of ordering the child in these things, they may do much good or much evil. I. In respect of money, how shall we order the child—THE LITTLE CHILD? How can you lecture an infant either on the proper value of money, or on the preposterous value that is often foolishly attached to it? Everything in its own place and time. Impress thereon a bias against the danger. Begin early to influence the infant mind. Show the child early the use of money—its use in obtaining necessaries, and in promoting works of benevolence. Train the child in the right direction as to the estimate of money, as to its use, and as to the objects on which it should be expended. In after life he will have much to do with it—teach him betimes to handle it aright. The infant is the germ of the man. The infant's habits, and likings, and actings, are the rivulet, already settling its direction, which will soon swell into the strong stream of life. II. In respect of money, how shall we order the YOUTH as to the choice and opening up of his path in life? The wary seaman will give an undefined sunken rock a good offing. He will take care to err on the safe side. The general rule is, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added." If this law were faithfully carried into practice, we would be safe. Deal honestly with yourselves when the prospect of an advantageous settlement appears. Judge righteous judgment, first as to the facts of the case, whether the money interest and the soul's interest be in opposition. Then, secondly, if so, judge which of the two should be allowed to go to the wall. Does the soul's safety overrule the prospect of wealth? or does the prospect of wealth silence your anxieties about the soul's safety? I do not ask any parent to bind his son to a poor trade, if a more profitable one is within his reach; but I demand of every parent, as he owes allegiance to the King of kings, that he have and manifest a supreme concern for the spiritual life of his children, and that, under the guidance of this ruling passion, he frame his plans and make his arrangements for their outset in the world. Under the head of provision made for an outset in life, the subject of matrimonial alliance deserves special notice. To marry for the sake of money is a degradation of the human being, and a prostitution of the good ordinance of God. It is fraught with danger to present peace and future salvation. III. How shall we order the child in respect to the acquisition and accumulation of MONEY TO BE BEQUEATHED AS HIS PORTION? Beware of tacitly

acting on the supposition that the more money you leave to them, the more good you will do to them. We cannot specify a sum, and say it is lawful for a Christian parent to bequeath so much to his child, but unlawful to exceed it. But it does not follow from this that a Christian is at liberty to scrape together as much money as he can during his life, and simply bequeath it to his children when he comes to die. Although no specific rule can be laid down, some useful suggestions may be given. A man of wealth should consider well before he leaves a large fortune to his son. It may in some cases be safely done; but it is not to be done as a thing of course. You would not spread a press of sail on a ship unless you had previously satisfied yourself that it had been rendered steady by a sufficient weight of ballast. So should parents consider the character and capacity of their children, and not be instrumental in causing their shipwreck by giving them more than they can manage. And as to the cruelty of leaving large fortunes to unprotected orphan girls, it is difficult to speak of it with coolness. It is like spreading rank carrion round the defenceless lamb, to attract the vultures to their prey. The example of a judicious but generous expenditure of money by a parent is a more precious legacy to his child than all the accumulations that parsimony and pride could bequeath. Finally, a good rule for Christian parents is to let prayer and pains always go together. In so far as he labours to provide for the education and the comfort of his children, especially those who are not likely to be able to gain their own livelihood, a father is at liberty to ask God's blessing on his efforts. But when one has already amassed many thousands, and is striving to amass more and more, to be left as a portion to his children, he would do well to add prayer to his pains. Let us remember that we and our children are under law to Christ, and on our way to the judgment. Let us act under the power of a world to come. Regarding money, like other talents, the command of the Lord is, not acquire and bequeath, but occupy. To use his money out well during his own life, is at once the best service to God which a parent can get of money, and the most valuable legacy which he can transmit to his child. (*W. Arnot.*)

Manoah knew not that he was an angel.—*Unrecognised angels*:—Ah! how few of us think that the heavens and the earth, the beneficent ministry of the sun, the glory of the moon, the splendour of the stars, the joy of the summer, the storms of the winter, are all angels of the Lord, bringing to us some revelation of Him, some glad tidings of His love for us. How few of us listen when He speaks to us through the common blessings that we receive every day, through our years of health, through all the joys and sunny hopes of youth, through the strength of manhood, the bliss of love or the good gifts of wife or children! How few of us, when sorrow enters our dwelling, or when sickness comes, realise that an angel of the Lord has come to us—a messenger from God with something on his lips which God wishes us to listen to and profit by! Ah, no. Most of us, if not all of us, are in such circumstances like Manoah, I fear. We do not know that it is an angel of the Lord. Their message is not listened to, and we are none the better, none the wiser for our angel visitants. It is, perhaps, however, not quite the same with us, when the messenger comes in the form of a sorrow, a disappointment, some heavy loss or cross, or some sad bereavement. We may say that they readily regard it as an angel of the Lord, but not as an angel of love. They look upon it rather as a messenger of anger, sent to avenge or punish. They ask themselves, "Why, what evil have I done that this should have been laid upon me?" But suffering is not sent in anger, but in mercy. It is often at least sent, not to destroy, but to correct, to awake, perhaps, some Divine energy in our souls. God knows all our shortcomings and all the dangers that threaten us. He knows where our faith is weak, where our love is languishing, or where we may be misplacing it. Is He unkind to us if, in these circumstances, He employs some sufficient means of showing us our mistake—showing us that we have been over-estimating the strength of our faith, the quality of our love, or the measure of our patience? He comes to point out to us a fault that we might correct it—a fault that if we remain unconscious of it will work for us the most disastrous consequences. Could a greater service, then, be done us—a greater or kinder? (*Wm. Ewen, B. D.*)

We shall surely die, because we have seen God.—*The spirit world*:—I. THE EARTHLY LIFE OF MAN IS IN CLOSE PROXIMITY TO THE SPIRIT WORLD. 1. Locally proximate. 2. Relationally proximate. 3. Sympathetically proximate. II. FROM THIS SPIRIT WORLD MEN SOMETIMES RECEIVE PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS. III. THE SAME COMMUNICATIONS AFFECT DIFFERENT PEOPLE IN DIFFERENT WAYS. (*Homilist.*) *Fears removed*:—I. WHAT PECULIAR IMPRESSIONS DIVINE MANIFESTATIONS MAKE UPON THE MIND. He impresses us with a sense of our danger, that we may flee for refuge;

with a sense of our pollution, that we may wash in the fountain which He has provided. II. THE DIFFERENCE THERE IS IN THE KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE OF THE LORD'S PEOPLE. What opposite conclusions do Manoah and his wife draw from the same event! He infers wrath; she, mercy. The former looks for destruction; the latter for salvation. Thus, there are degrees in grace. There is hope, and the full assurance of hope. Some have little faith; others are "strong in faith," "rich in faith." And this difference is not always to be judged of by the order of nature, or external advantages. We find here the weaker vessel the stronger believer. III. THE PROFIT THAT IS TO BE DERIVED FROM A PIOUS COMPANION. Man is formed for society, and religion indulges and sanctifies the social principle. And if a man be concerned for his spiritual welfare, he will be glad to meet with those who are travelling the same road, and are partakers of the same hopes and fears: he will be thankful to have one near him who will watch over him, and admonish him; who by seasonable counsel will fix him when wavering, embolden him when timid, and comfort him when cast down. And it is to be observed, that in spiritual distress we are often suspicious of our own reasonings and conclusions: we know the deceitfulness of our own hearts, and are afraid lest while they encourage they should ensnare. We can depend with more confidence upon the declarations of our fellow Christians. IV. HOW MUCH THERE IS IN THE LORD'S DEALINGS WITH HIS PEOPLE TO ENCOURAGE THEM AT ALL TIMES, IF THEY HAVE SKILL ENOUGH TO DISCERN IT. How well did this woman reason! How naturally, yet how forcibly! "Nay—let us not turn that against us, which is really for us. Surely the tokens of His favour are not the pledges of His wrath." Her conclusion is drawn from two things. First, the acceptance of their sacrifice. It is not His manner to accept the offering, and reject the person. Secondly, the secrets with which He had favoured them. This regards the birth of their son, his education, his deliverance of their country—if the accomplishment of this be certain, our destruction is impossible. Let us leave Manoah and his wife, and think of ourselves. It is a dreadful thing for God to kill us. What is the loss of property, of health, or even of life, to the loss of the soul? Hence it becomes unspeakably important to know how He means to deal with us. And there are satisfactory evidences that He is not our enemy, but our friend, and concerned for our welfare. Surely, He does not excite expectations to disappoint us; or desires, to torment us. Surely, He does not produce a new taste, a new appetite, without meaning to indulge, to relieve it. What He begins, He is able to finish; and when He begins, He designs to finish. (*W. Jay.*) *Manoah and his wife*:—I. OBSERVE THE HUSBAND AS REPRESENTING HUMAN NATURE TROUBLED WITH A SENSE OF GUILT. You say you walk about among God's works, and wonder at their magnificence and beauty—why should you be afraid of Him? Why should a child be afraid of his father? Ah! why, indeed? Yet I believe you are afraid of God, and I would have you acknowledge it. God's works are indeed very beautiful. He did paint those flowers which you admire, and clothe those fruit trees with their spring blossoms. But it is God, not as the painter of flowers, nor the giver of fruits, but as the avenger of sin, with whom you have to do. There is one place where you do expect you will meet with God, one place certainly. How dreadful is that place! You turn away from it. At all costs you would avoid it: I refer to the place of death. You will meet God there; and you feel the presentiment in the terrible thoughts of your heart. II. THE WOMAN REPRESENTING HUMAN NATURE WHEN CHEERED WITH A SIGN OF MERCY. She correctly interpreted the signs of God's propitiation, and received the consolatory assurance of deliverance from death. Comforted herself, she could comfort her husband with the assurances of mercy, and refer him for satisfaction and a good hope to the auspicious sign of reconciliation. Yet her signs of peace were not like yours, and her words but a poor interpretation of the gospel of your reconciliation. An angel in the flame ascending to heaven!—You see Christ in your own nature ascending to His Father. A kid for a burnt-offering!—You have a brother giving himself for you, a sacrifice and an offering of a sweet-smelling savour to God. Manoah chose the kid from his own flock. God found, not a lamb of His own fold, but the Son of His own bosom, and freely gave Him up for us all. With every qualification this sacrifice was endowed—"a Lamb without spot or blemish"—"the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." (*R. Halley, D.D.*) *Manoah's wife and her excellent argument*:—1. Oftentimes we pray for blessings which will make us tremble when we receive them. Often the blessing which we used so eagerly to implore is the occasion of the suffering which we deplore. 2. Very frequently deep prostration of spirit is the forerunner of some remarkable blessing. Take it as a general rule that

dull skies foretell a shower of mercy. Expect sweet favour when you experience sharp affliction. Blessed be God for rough winds. They have blown home many a barque which else had sailed to destruction. Blessed be our Master for the fire: it has burnt away the dross. Blessed be our Master for the file: it has taken off the rust. 3. Great faith is in many instances subject to fits. Do not judge a man by any solitary word or act, for if you do you will surely mistake him. Trembling Manoah was so outspoken, honest, and sincere that he expressed his feelings, which a more politic person might have concealed. 4. It is a great mercy to have a Christian companion to go to for counsel and comfort whenever your soul is depressed. Manoah had married a capital wife. She was the better one of the two in sound judgment. She had three strings to her bow, good woman. One was —The Lord does not mean to kill us, because He has accepted our sacrifices. The second was—He does not mean to kill us, or else He would not have shown us all these things. And the third was—He will not kill us, or else He would not, as at this time, have told us such things as these. So the three strings to her bow were accepted sacrifices, gracious revelations, and precious promises. Let us dwell upon each of them. I. ACCEPTED SACRIFICES. This being interpreted into the gospel is just this—Have we not seen the Lord Jesus Christ fastened to the Cross? Because the fire of Jehovah's wrath has spent itself on Him we shall not die. He has died instead of us. But, if you notice, in the case of Manoah, they had offered a burnt-sacrifice and a meat-offering too. Well, now, in addition to the great sacrifice of Christ, which is our trust, we have offered other sacrifices to God, and in consequence of His acceptance of such sacrifices we cannot imagine that He intends to destroy us. First, let me conduct your thoughts back to the offering of prayer which you have presented. I will speak for myself. I am as sure that my requests have been heard as ever Manoah could have been sure that his sacrifice was consumed upon the rock. May I not infer from this that the Lord does not mean to destroy me? Again, you brought to Him, years ago, not only your prayers but yourself. You gave yourself over to Christ, "Lord, I am not my own, but I am bought with a price." You have at this very moment a lively recollection of the sweet sense of acceptance you had at that time. Now, would the Lord have accepted the offering of yourself to Him if He meant to destroy you? That cannot be. Some of us can recollect how, growing out of this last sacrifice, there have been others. The Lord has accepted our offerings at other times, too, for our works, faith, and labours of love have been owned of His Spirit. "Therefore He does not mean to kill us." "Who said He did?" says somebody. Well, the devil has said that numbers of times. He is a liar from the beginning, and he does not improve a bit. Reply to him, if he is worth replying to at all, in the language of our text. II. GRACIOUS REVELATIONS. 1. First, the Lord has shown you—your sin. A deep sense of sin will not save you, but it is a pledge that there is something begun in your soul which may lead to salvation; for that deep sense of sin does as good as say, "The Lord is laying bare the disease that He may cure it. He is letting you see the foulness of that underground cellar of your corruption, because He means to cleanse it for you." 2. But He has shown us more than this, for He has made us see the hollowness and emptiness of the world. Do you think that, if the Lord had meant to kill us, He would have taught us this? Why, no; He would have said, "Let them alone, they are given unto idols. They are only going to have one world in which they can rejoice; let them enjoy it." 3. But He has taught us something better than this—namely, the preciousness of Christ. Unless we are awfully deceived we have known what it is to lose the burden of our sin at the foot of the Cross. We have known what it is to see the suitability and all-sufficiency of the merit of our dear Redeemer, and we have rejoiced in Him with joy unspeakable and full of glory. If He had meant to destroy us He would not have shown us Christ. 4. Sometimes also we have strong desires after God! What pinings after communion with Him have we felt! What longings to be delivered from sin! Now these longings, cravings, do you think the Lord would have put them into our hearts if He had meant to destroy us? III. MANY PRECIOUS PROMISES. "Nor would He have told us such things as these." "If the Lord had meant to kill us He would not have made us such a promise as this." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The spectacle of life and the opposite conclusions drawn from it*:—We, too, draw just such opposite conclusions from the same admitted phenomena. The facts of life are the same. We admit into the great problem of existence the presence of the powers of this life and of the life to come. There is the world of regret and sorrow, and the world of cheerfulness and hope; there is the secret of the angel's

name, and there is religion, with its rocky altar of sacrifice; there is the fire of man's communion with God ascending to heaven, and there is an admitted power in our lives "doing wondrously." And yet, as in this grouping of the forces and interests of life around Manoah's altar, men draw diametrically opposite conclusions. Let us look at three of the common facts of life concerning which we may draw right or wrong conclusions, according as we look at them through desperation or through hopefulness. I. Take, first, the thought of CHARACTER. This includes the entire world of conduct and action—the question of law and authority, the right or wrong quality of a man's motives and his deeds. How are we to regard all this? Is there such a thing as absolute right and truth? Would it exist anywhere if man did not exist? Is it from a God, a Being whose lines have gone out into all the world? Is this power which makes for righteousness, as Matthew Arnold calls it, a motion, an impulse from a seat and source of law, or is it only like some wild, driving gale whose conflicting winds have no definite whence and are seeking no final whither? The Manoah type of mind declares, here are glimpses of some power "working wondrously" in the midst of life; but we can make nothing out of them. We have seen strange sights in the history of humanity and in the experience of our own souls; but we can see nothing but despair and death before us. The other, the religious type of mind, pleads with the wiser wife and mother, would we have all these visions and intimations if there was not a reason for them? Would the Lord have received our offerings, and have told us all these things if He were only pleased to kill us? II. Look at the fact of LIFE, with all its laws, physical, mental, and social. Look at this wondrous organism of ours, with its complex and far-reaching functions. We move through the world as the planets whirl on through space, each soul being a world of its own, with its own laws, and tendencies, and orbit. Is it any wonder that philosophers are forever investigating its meaning and giving us new views of the relationship between the working principle in life and the working principle in death? One side declares we have seen all these wonders, therefore we, too, must die; life is only the bubbling up of a few moments' consciousness, like the evanescent spray in the leap of Niagara's plunge, and then all is deep and quiet again. The other class says, No; this existence is not a mere guess; there is law, and Providence, and love in it; if the Lord were pleased to kill us He would not have told us such things as these. III. There is the question of THE FUTURE. It is very strange to think how theological theories and opinions go in sets and groups. It is impossible to have them separated or to hold them singly. One view leads on to another and draws it after it by a logical necessity. If you deny a personal immortality, you will find that locked up with this negation is your disbelief in a God; or, if you deny a God, you will find that immortality goes with this fundamental denial. Grant the premises of hope or of despair, and the conclusions will haunt you just as your shadow plays round your hurrying form under the successive street lights of a city in the darkness of night. At one moment it follows, at another it precedes your step, but it is always about you, because a shadow, after all, is only the deprivation of light due to a body. And so, with reference to the future, there is no standing-ground between the creed of despair and the creed of hope; between a blind force working in the smoke of our best sacrifices, and a messenger from God working wondrously, as the flame of our truest love ascends and is accepted. And thus we should value the revelation Christ has made, when once we feel from what that Saviour rescues us! (*W. W. Newton.*) *Cheer for the faint-hearted*:—Faith is not only the door by which we enter into the way of salvation, as it is written "He hath opened the door of faith unto the gentiles"; but it likewise describes the entire path of Christian pilgrimage, "that we also walk in the steps of that faith." "The just shall live by faith." Happy is that man who, steadfast, upright, cheerful, goes from strength to strength, believing his God! Trusting in his God, he knows no care; resting in his God, he knows no impossibility. 1. But, it seems from our text, that the strongest faith has its seasons of wavering. Most of those eminent saints, who are mentioned in Scripture as exhibiting faith in its greatness, appear to have sometimes showed the white flag of unbelief. Good Lord! of what small account are the best of men apart from Thee! How high they go when Thou liftest them up! How low they fall if Thou withdraw Thine hand! 2. Some of these greatest aberrations of faith have occurred just after the brightest seasons of enjoyment. Some of us have learned to be afraid of joy. Sadness is often the herald of satisfaction; but bliss is ofttimes the harbinger of pain. 3. It is a very happy thing if, when one believer's down, there is another near to lift him up. In

this case Manoah found in his wife a help-meet. If wife and husband had both been down at one time, they might have been long in getting up. But seeing that when he fell she was there strong in faith to give him a helping hand, it was but a slight fall, and they went on their way rejoicing. If thou art strong, help thy weak brother. If thou seest any bowed down, take them on thy shoulders, help to carry them. 4. The text suggests certain consolations which ought to be laid hold of by believers in Christ in their time of sore trouble. You are chastened every morning, and you are troubled all day long, and Satan whispered to you last Saturday night, when you were putting up the shutters as tired as you could be, "It is no use going to the house of God to-morrow. There is nothing there for you. God has forsaken you, and your enemies are persecuting you on every side." Well, now, it would be a very curious thing if it were true; but it is not true, for the reasons which Manoah's wife gave. Recollect, first, the Lord has in your case accepted a burnt-offering and a meat-offering at your hand. Would He have accepted your faith and saved you in Christ, if He had meant to destroy you? What! can you trust Him with your soul, and not trust Him with your shop? Can you leave eternity with Him, and not leave time? What! trust the immortal spirit, and not this poor decaying, mouldering, flesh and blood? Man, shame on thee! But, you say, He will forsake you in this trouble. Remember what things He has shown to you. Why, what has your past life been? Has not it been a wonder? You have been in as bad a plight as you are in to-night scores of times, and you have got out of it. Besides this, Manoah's wife gave a third reason, "Nor would He at this time have told us such things as these." She meant that He would not have given them such prophecies of the future as He had done, if He meant to kill them. It stood to reason, she seemed to say, "If I am to bear a son, we are not going to die." And so, remember, God has made one or two promises which are true, and if they be true, it stands to reason He won't leave you. Let us have one of them. "No good thing will I withhold from them that walk uprightly." But suppose, next, that you are in some spiritual trouble. "Oh," say you, "this is worse than temporal trial," and indeed it is. Touch a man in his house, and he can bear it: but touch him in his soul, and in his faith, and then it is hard to lay hold on God, and trust Him still. The enemy had thrust sore at Manoah to vex him and make him fret. There may be some here whose spiritual enemy has set upon them dreadfully of late, and he has been howling in your ears, "It's all over with you; you are cast off, God has rejected you." I tell thee, soul, if the Lord had ever meant to destroy thee, He would never have permitted thee to know a precious Christ, or to put thy trust in Him. Besides, fallen though you now are, through sore and travail, yet was there not a time when you saw the beauty of God in His temple? To conclude the argument of Manoah's wife, what promises God has made even to you! What has He said of His people? "I will surely bring them in." "I give unto My sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of My hand." And what does Christ say again?—"Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Manoah's wife*:—Here is the head of the house in gloom. Is he not always more or less in gloom, this same head of the house all the world over? Who ever knew a head of the house that was not more or less low-spirited, worried by a hundred anxieties, tormented by sudden fear? Perhaps naturally so: after all he is the head of the house; and probably the lightning conductor, being higher than any other part of the building, may have experience of thunder-storms and lightning discharges that lower parts of the structure know nothing about. Here we have a wife comforting her husband. Like a true woman, she let Manoah have his groan out. There is a beautiful cunning in love. It lets the groan get right out, and then it offers its gentle consolation. If we had heard Manoah alone, we should have said, A terrible thunder-storm has burst upon this house, and God has come down upon it with awful vengeance; and not until we heard his wife's statement of the case should we have any clear idea of the reality of the circumstances. The husband does not know all the case. Perhaps the wife would read the case a little too hopefully. You must hear both the statements, put them both together, and draw your conclusions from the twofold statement. People are the complement of each other. Woe to that man who thinks he combines all populations and all personalities in himself. Here we have a husband and wife talking over a difficult case. Is not that a rare thing in these days of rush and tumult and noise, when a man never sees his little children, his very little ones, except in bed? He leaves home so

early in the morning, and gets back so late at night, that he never sees his little ones but in slumber. Is it not now a rare thing for a husband and wife to sit down and talk a difficulty over in all its bearings? If we lived in more domestic confidence our houses would be homes, our homes would be churches, and those churches would be in the very vicinity of heaven. Let us now look at the incident as showing some methods of reading Divine Providence. There we have the timid and distrustful method. Manoah looks at the case, reads it, spells where he cannot read plainly, and then, looking up from his book, he says to his wife, "There is bad news for you; God is about to destroy us." It is possible so to read God's ways among men as to bring upon ourselves great distress. Is a man, therefore, to exclaim, "This is a punishment sent from heaven for some inscrutable reason, and I must endure it as well as I can; I shall never see the sky when not a cloud bedims its dome"? No, you are to struggle against this, you are to believe other people; that is to say, you are to live in other people's lives, to get out of other people the piece that is wanting in your life. This is the inductive and hopeful method of reading Divine Providence. I think that Manoah's wife was in very deed learned in what we called the inductive method of reasoning, for she stated her case with wonderful simplicity and clearness. "If the Lord were pleased to kill us, He would not have received a burnt-offering and a meat-offering at our hands," &c. That is logic! That is the inductive method!—the method, namely, of putting things together and drawing a conclusion from the aggregate. Thank God if you have a wife who can talk like that. Manoah's wife was of a hopeful turn of mind. She had the eye which sees flecks of blue in the darkest skies. She had the ear which hears the softest goings of the Eternal. She was an interpreter of the Divine thought. Oh, to have such an interpreter in every house, to have such an interpreter in every pulpit in England, to have such a companion on the high-way of venture and enterprise! This is the eye that sees further than the dull eye of criticism can ever see, that sees God's heart, that reads meanings that seem to be written afar. Have we this method of reading Divine Providence? I call it the appreciative and thankful method. Put together your mercies, look at them as a whole and say, Can this mean death, or does it mean life? and I know what the glad answer will be. There are some sources of consolation amid the distractions and mysteries of the present world. Every life has some blessings. Men eagerly count up their misfortunes and trials, but how few remember their mercies! Every life has some blessing, and we must find what that blessing or those blessings are. We must put them together, and reason from the goodness towards the glory of God. Amid these blessings religious privileges are sure signs of the Divine favour. We have religious privileges: we can go into the sanctuary; we can take counsel together; we can kneel side by side in prayer; we can go to the very best sources for religious instruction and religious comfort. Does God mean to kill when He has given us such proofs of favour as these? Let us learn from this family scene that great joys often succeed great fears. Manoah said, The Lord intends to kill us: his wife said, Not so, or He would not have received a burnt-offering at our hands. And behold Samson was born, a judge of Israel, an avenger of mighty wrongs. Is it ever so dark as just before the dawn? Are you not witnesses that a great darkness always precedes a great light—that some peculiar misery comes to prepare the way for some unusual joy? Let us read the goodness of God in others. Many a time I have been recovered from practical atheism by reading other people's experience. When things seem to have been going wrong with myself, I have looked over into my neighbour's garden and seen his flowers, and my heart has been cheered by the vision. Oh, woman, talk of your mission! Here is your mission described and exemplified in the case of the wife of Manoah. Here is your field of operation. Cheer those who are dispirited; read the Word of God in its spirit to those who can only read its cold, meagre letter, and the strongest of us will bless you for your gentle ministry. Who was it in the days of Scottish persecution? Was it not Helen Stirk—a braver Helen than the fiend Macgregor—who said to her husband as they were carried forth both to be executed, "Husband, rejoice, for we have lived together many joyful days; but this day wherein we die together ought to be most joyful to us both, because we must have joy forever; therefore I will not bid you good-night, for we shall suddenly meet within the kingdom of heaven"? Who was it when Whitefield was mobbed and threatened, and when even he was about to give way—who was it but his wife who took hold of his robe and said, "George, play the man for your God"? Oh, woman, talk of your rights, and your sphere, and your having nothing to do! Have a sphere of

labour at home, go into sick chambers and speak as only a woman can speak. Counsel your sons as if you were not dictating to them. Read Providence to your husband in an incidental manner, as if you were not reproaching him for his dulness, but simply hinting that you had seen unexpected light. Women have always said the finest things that have ever been said in the Bible. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Past tokens of Divine favour an encouragement against fears:*—I. WHAT ARE THOSE TOKENS OF FAVOUR WHICH HAVE BEEN SHOWN EVERY TRUE BELIEVER? 1. Is it no token of God's favour that you have been kept alive to your calling? that you were not suffered to drop into hell before you had any knowledge of the way to heaven? 2. It is a token of distinguishing favour that thou hast not received the gospel of "the grace of God in vain" (2 Cor. vi. 1). The gospel has been welcomed not only to thy house, but to thine heart. 3. It is a token of distinguishing favour that thou hast at any time seen the truth of thy own grace. As thy God hath His hiding times, so there are also times of finding (Psa. xxxii. 6). Many a prayer begun in distress has ended in delight. Thy God has raised thee out of thy depths, and set thee on thy high places. 4. It is a token of distinguishing favour that thou hast been kept from falling by temptations, or that thou hast been recovered when fallen. Afflictions have purged thy dross, and brightened thy gold. Unruly thoughts have been often quieted by Divine consolations. 5. It is a token of distinguishing favour that thou hast been kept close to the appointed ways and means of comfort, under all thy complaints for want of comfort. To be out of the way of duty is to be out of the way of comfort. It is a mark of distinguishing mercy to be kept in the way of comfort. II. WHAT ARE THOSE THINGS WHICH GOD IS EVEN NOW SHOWING THE CHRISTIAN UNDER ALL HIS DARKNESS AND FEARS? 1. Believers see a loveliness in Christ's person, when they cannot discern interest in His love. 2. Believers have strong desires after the truth of grace when they most complain under the want of it. Sorrow and godly mourning flow from love, as well as joy and praise. 3. When believers cannot find sin mortified, it is their desire and prayer that it may be rooted out. It is more on account of indwelling sin, than any worldly affliction and sorrow, that you hear the Christian crying with David (Psa. lv. 6). It is by flight doves secure themselves, not by fright. A believer's aim is levelled at the root of sin. 4. Weak as his hope is, a believer dare not cast it away in its darkest seasons. It is the language of his heart, "Yea, though He slay me, yet I will trust in Him." If he cannot go to the throne as sanctified in Christ and called, he will fall down at the footstool as a perishing sinner. III. WHY SUCH WHO HAVE BEEN, AND ARE, BLESSED WITH SUCH TOKENS OF GOD'S FAVOUR SHALL NEVER DIE UNDER HIS WRATH. 1. This would argue God to be wavering and imperfect like ourselves. The great God may alter His way, but He never changes His heart. 2. Were God to accept thy offering, and destroy thy person, what becomes of His faithfulness to Christ the Mediator? Christ purchased, and He intercedes for the weakest grace. 3. Should God kill us, after such grace shown us, one in whom the Spirit inhabits would be lost. 4. God would lose the triumphs of His own grace: "Grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life." Grace in us is a creature, but it is kept alive by the grace in God's heart, which is infinite and everlasting. Use 1. See what use you are to make of past experiences. Carry them about with you by faith, that you may turn to them in time of need. Use 2. Be humbled for the weakness of faith, in so great a multitude of experiences. Use 3. Labour to encourage sinners by your taste and experiences of mercy. You were not rejected in your suit for mercy; why then should they doubt in their desires for the same blessing? "With the Lord there is plenteous redemption." Use 4. Bless God for Christ, all your offerings go up with acceptance on this altar (Heb. xiii. 15). (*John Jamieson, M.A.*) *Some lessons of catastrophes:*—It seems inevitable that some persons will continue to regard all disastrous occurrences as marks of God's displeasure with His human creatures. The pietist reads of a terrible fire in some city particularly noted for the irreligion of its masses of people, and he believes it to be the judgment of God upon the sinful ones. Morbid Christians too are ever disposed to regard the mischances of their own temporal experience as the punishment God is laying upon them for their sins; and sometimes they are fain to cry out, as in indignation, "What have I done so wickedly as to deserve such retribution as this?" Our Lord neither suffers us thus to assign His judgments to particular instances of offending, nor yet to assume that we ourselves do not deserve quite as much as we ever hear of others bearing (Luke xiii. 1–5). I. IT IS TRUE THAT THE MOST OF APPALLING DISASTERS FALL IMPARTIALLY UPON THE GOD-FEARING AND IMPIOUS ALIKE. II. MEN WHO DWELL

MUCH UPON THE DISASTERS WHICH ASSAIL IN SO MANY DIRECTIONS OUR SOCIAL LIFE GROW SUPERSTITIOUS ABOUT THEM. Every supernatural manifestation, or what seems to be supernatural, inspires fear. No doubt this is because of the consciousness of sin in our lives. III. GOD HAS WILLED TO BE A FEAR-INSPIRING GOD TO HIS SINFUL CREATURES BECAUSE THERE IS NO BETTER WAY THAN THIS WHEREBY TO IMPRESS UPON THEM HIS SUPREMACY, THE ABSOLUTE AUTHORITY AND RIGHT WHICH HE HAS OVER THEM. We do not like to think of our humanity as degraded, yet all sound philosophy insists upon this. Then God interferes with His awe-inspiring visitations, compelling us to remember that there is a greater existence outside the realm of familiar nature, and a Ruler of the universe whom one cannot disobey with impunity. IV. Notwithstanding this truth, THERE ARE QUESTIONS WHICH ARISE, WHICH MUST ARISE, IN MEN'S MINDS CONCERNING THE TREMENDOUS DISASTERS SO OFTEN EXPERIENCED IN LIFE. Granting that no one is free from sin, that no one deserves favour or blessing at God's hands, nevertheless there are many who are loyal at heart and are striving to be good disciples of the gentle Christ. Why does He, who is so good, allow these to be subjected to such terrifying possibilities as Nature's catastrophes so frequently suggest? 1. It may be that He displays His mighty judgments, menacing to the faithful as well as to the irreligious, in order to keep us ever mindful of our unpreparedness for His coming to call us to account. Who is there that is ready at this moment to die? 2. There is nothing which is so well calculated to make us realise the evanescent character of the circumstances which now surround us, as the irresistible breaking in upon the harmony of these circumstances by startling catastrophes and terror-inspiring disasters. Such things awe wise-hearted men, and set them to thinking; and when they think seriously they are sure the invisible and eternal things are more worthy to be considered than the visible and transitory things. V. At this point the question suggests itself, WHY IN DECLARING HIS SUPERNATURAL RULE OVER OUR AFFAIRS BY MEANS OF TREMENDOUS DISTURBANCES OF OUR ORDINARY COURSE OF LIFE DOES GOD CAUSE THE INNOCENT TO SUFFER WITH THE GUILTY, or rather, in view of what I have just said, those who are trying to do His will and to use profitably the lessons He would teach them, as well as the hardened and the despisers of His judgments. 1. As to that let it be noted that while we naturally look upon death as almost the gravest of disasters the individual can experience, from the Christian point of view it cannot be in the least a disaster for him who is prepared to meet his God. The blow of death falls upon those who are left behind, the mourners, the relations and friends of the departed; but for him, if he be Christ's, the passing of the soul is its entrance into the land of life where no further temptation can try it, nor any power of the Evil One cause it to fall from God. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord: even so saith the Spirit; for they rest from their labours." 2. So far as the unrighteous are concerned, the sinful, the careless, the impenitent, who have never feared God nor troubled themselves to do His will, we may be sure of this, the bolt of the Divine wrath does not strike them until they have made it abundantly clear to the heavenly eyes that they will never repent, never choose the right. VI. AFTER ALL, THEN, IN SPITE OF THE APPALLING CATASTROPHES LIFE IS SO ABUNDANTLY CHEQUERED WITH, IT IS CERTAIN THAT GOD'S PITY EVER SWAYS HIS WRATH, SO LONG AS PITY CAN AVAIL. From Manoah's word of terror we turn to the wiser saying of his wife. We are to find the assurance of the mercifulness of our Heavenly Father in the good things provided for us in our religion, which are not to be accounted for at all except on the hypothesis of His kindness towards the children of men. 1. "Would He, if He were pleased to kill us, have received a burnt-offering and a meat-offering at our hands?" Aye, would He, for this is plainly the meaning of that long-ago sacrifice of the pious parents of Samson, have sent His only-begotten Son into the world to die for us the shameful death of the Cross? 2. "Neither," continues Manoah's wife, "would He have showed us all these things." Would God, indeed, if He were hard and relentless in His dealings with mankind have caused to be written for our learning and unceasing consolation the exquisite story of the gospel—all the pathetic details of the human life of the Lord Christ? 3. Once more the spiritually minded woman cries: "Nor would He at this time have told us such things as these." Ask yourself, Christian soul, what are you living for—what is your hope? Is it merely that you may escape eternal fire, or is it rather, and much more a great deal, that you may come to the unspeakable joys? Would God, if He did not love us supremely, have revealed to us all those glorious things of which St. John writes in the Apocalypse—the story of the land full of beauty, of all-satisfying delights?

(*Arthur Ritchie.*) *Mysteries of providence:*—Manoah feared that he and his wife were going to be destroyed, because they had been visited by an angel of God. Our text is his wife's reply to him. We often need to apply a similar train of reasoning to the mysteries of Providence. God's angels come to us in fearful forms—the angels of disease, desolation, and death. At such times the murmuring heart will say in distrust, "Why hast Thou done thus?" The one calamitous event often stands out by itself. Nothing has gone before it to interpret it, or to lighten its severity; nothing has accompanied it for our special relief or solace; and nothing has as yet followed it in the world without, or in our own experience, to justify the ways of God, and to sustain submission by reason. Under these mysterious visitations of Providence we are driven, or rather we gladly have recourse, to reasoning like that in our text. We appeal to other and more frequent experiences, in which the Divine mercy has been manifest,—to sorrows which have been sanctified to our growth in grace, and to our long seasons of unmingled and unclouded happiness. If by the present sorrow God meant to crush us to the earth, if it came even on an errand of doubtful mercy, the past could not have been what it has been. Divine love could not thus have followed us step by step, and hour by hour, only to prepare for us a severer fall and a deeper gloom. In tracing out this thought let us follow the order suggested by our text. 1. "If the Lord were pleased to kill us, He would not have received a burnt-offering at our hands." Have not burnt-offerings from our households gone up to God, —lambs without fault or stain, not indeed selected by ourselves, but chosen by the Most High,—taken wholly from us, consumed, lost to the outward sight,—their unseen spirits mounting to the upper heaven, as the smoke from the ancient altars rose to the sky? These bereavements have left blessings in their train. When met and borne in faith they have given us new experience of spiritual joy. They have opened new fountains of inward life. They have bound us by new and stronger ties to the unseen world. Our sorrows have cut short our sins, nurtured our faith, given vividness to our hope, and made our love more and more like that of the Universal Father. In new sorrows, then, from which we have not had time to gather in and count the happy fruits, we will hear from like scenes that are past the call to trust and gratitude. Did it please God to destroy us, He would not have accepted our burnt-offerings. 2. Nor yet our meat-offerings. Have those alms gone forth which may sanctify all the rest? If offered God has accepted and blessed them. And whether we have rendered or withholden them, how many are the favours, the deliverances, the peculiar mercies of our homes, to which we should look back, when in any hour of doubt or sorrow a murmuring spirit would arraign the Divine goodness! 3. To pursue the order of the text—"If the Lord were pleased to kill us, neither would He have showed us all these things." What has He showed us? What is He daily showing us? How much is there in every scene and form of outward nature to rebuke distrust, to quell fear, and to make us feel that the world we live in is indeed our Father's! From the first song of the birds to the last ray of mellow twilight, whether in sunshine, beneath sheltering clouds, or fresh from the baptism of the midday shower, the whole scene is full of the present and the loving God. He sustains the wayfaring sparrow. He gives the raven his food. He clothes the frail field-flower with beauty. In our seasons of doubt, darkness, and sorrow have not these miracles of Divine care and love a message from God for us? 4. Manoah's wife added, "If the Lord were pleased to kill us, He would not have told us such things as these." She referred to promised temporal mercies in her own household. God has told us yet more, infinitely more. In the revelation by Jesus Christ He has revealed to us truths and given us promises which, received in faith, must put to flight all hopeless despondency and gloom. In His teachings and in the record of His pilgrimage we learn all that we can need to know of the mysterious dealings of Providence. To interpret them fully we cannot expect or hope. But we do learn, and are left without a remaining doubt, that, when the most severe, they are sent in love—are hidden mercies, designed to discipline our faith, to spiritualise our affections, and to draw us into closer fellowship with our Saviour's sufferings, that we may afterwards become partakers of His glory. (*A. P. Peabody.*) *God's past mercies a ground of hope for the future:*—It is a safe method for us to follow—to plead God's past mercies as a ground of hope for the future. His rule is grace upon grace. He that has receives more. It is not irreverent to say that He who gave His Son for us, will with Him give us all things. Is it, then, reasonable to fear that He who has preserved us for forty years will fail us for the next twenty, if our pilgrimage

should continue so long? He who made you, aged friend, and gave His Son to redeem you, will not suffer you to perish for the want of meaner things. And the feeling of your need of His grace is a proof that He is waiting to be gracious. Even the anxious inquiry after salvation proves that the work is already begun. Penitential pangs are not natural but gracious, and argue that God has laid His hand upon us. All His works are perfect. He will not leave His work of grace half finished. Nor would He have told us such things of His love and grace if He did not offer pardon and eternal life to us in perfect good faith on the terms propounded in the gospel. And surely the argument from past experience should be a satisfactory one. Experience worketh hope, and hope maketh not ashamed (Rom. v. 4, 5). Is it not an impeachment of the Divine sincerity to fear that if God begins a good work, He will not complete it? It cannot be that supreme benevolence tantalises us. If so, why has He ever opened our hearts to our need of salvation? Why do we feel our guilt, and desire to escape from the wrath to come? Surely He would not have announced to us the glad tidings of the gospel—would not have made to us such full and free offers of mercy, if He were not pleased to accept us. Surely there is honesty in the declaration: "It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners"—even the chief of sinners. God's acceptance of the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ, is a positive proof that His merits and mediation are available for us. (*W. A. Scott, D.D.*)

Vers. 24, 25. **Samson.**—*Samson:*—The history of Samson is surprising even in an extraordinary age. In several particulars he was the most distinguished of the Hebrew judges. And though never at the head of an army, nor on a throne, nor prime minister to any earthly potentate, it were difficult, perhaps impossible, to name another Hebrew that loved his country with more fervid devotion, or served it with a more hearty good will, or who was a greater terror to its enemies. I know not that there is any biography so completely characteristic or more tragical than his. It is full of stirring incidents and most marvellous achievements. He seems to us like a volcano, continually struggling for an eruption. In him we have all the elements of an epic: love, adventure, heroism, tragedy. Nor am I aware that any Bible character has lent to modern literature a greater amount of metaphor and comparison than the story of Samson. The "Samson Agonistes" of Milton has been pronounced by the highest authority to be "one of the noblest dramas in the English language." It reminds us of the mystic touches and shadowy grandeur of Rembrandt, while Rembrandt himself and Rubens, Guido, David, and Martin are indebted to this heroic judge for several of their immortal pieces. I am aware that some look upon Samson merely as a strong man. They do not consider that the moving of the Spirit of Jehovah gave extraordinary strength to Samson for special purposes. His peculiarities are not remarkable, because of anything that we perceive foreign to fallen humanity in the kind or composition of his passions and besetting sins, but in the fierceness and greatness of their strength. Ordinary men now have the same besetting sins—passions of the same character, but they are diminutive in comparison with him, and are without his supernatural strength. It must be confessed in the outset that Samson's spiritual history is very skeleton-like. We have only a few time-worn fragments out of which to construct his inner man. Now and then, and sometimes after long and dreary intervals, and from out of heavy clouds and thick darkness, we catch a few rays of hope, and rejoice in some signs of a reviving conscience and of the presence of God's Spirit. "His character is indeed dark and almost inexplicable. By none of the judges of Israel did God work so many miracles, and yet by none were so many faults committed." As an old writer has said, he must be looked upon as "rather a rough believer." I like not to dwell on Samson as a type of Christ. We must at least guard against removing him so far from us by reason of his uniqueness of character as to forget that he was a man of like passions with ourselves. We must carefully discriminate in his life between what God moved him to do and what his sinful passions moved him to. The Lord raised up this heroic Israelite for us. He threw into him a miraculous composition of strength and energy of passion, and called them forth in such a way as to make him our teacher. And besides being a hero, he was a believer. God raised him up for our learning, and made him, as it were, "a mirror or molten looking-glass," in which we may see some of our own leading features truthfully portrayed, only on an enlarged scale. (*W. A. Scott, D.D.*) *The place of Samson in Jewish history:*—1. Two things stand out in the narrative

of Samson's career, as compared with the history of at least the majority of the other judges. (1) The other judges fight God's battles with the people at their backs. They simply give aid and point to a sense of rising strength, of impatience of subjection, of reviving national pride and religious zeal in the Hebrew people. Samson, on the contrary, stands utterly alone, fights his battle single-handed, is supported by no enthusiasm for the national cause, and not even by common loyalty on the part of his own comrades. (2) The other judges are chosen to their office as mature men, but Samson is set apart to his career as an unborn child. From his very infancy the sense of his vocation takes possession of him; as child and boy and youth it is making and moulding him, and preparing him for what he is to be. The explanation of these two characteristic features of his history, which distinguish it from that of the other judges, lies in this, that Samson's lot in life fell upon a period of utter national demoralisation. Israel had elapsed into subjection to the despised, uncircumcised Philistines. All national spirit was dying out, and the prestige of Jehovah was giving way before the prestige of Dagon. Now the only hope for the redemption of a society that has fallen into a condition of such lassitude, mental and moral, lies in the creation of a fresh and powerful personality. 2. How, humanly speaking, was Samson prepared for his work? (1) To begin with, God made a cradle and a home for him. Samson's mother was a woman with a great soul and a large heart, to whom God was a reality; a woman who could not indeed fight God's battles and deliver God's people, but who lived with the upper storeys of her being in the unseen, and was possessed with a tremendous longing that there should be deliverance for Israel, that something heroic should appear in history, and that God should vindicate His might and grandeur above the heathen gods. Samson was born to a mother that longed for a boy, not that he might rise to comfort and ease, but that he might be lofty and heroic, and fight and, if need be, die for God and God's kingdom. To her son she transmits her hope, faith, and enthusiasm. (2) From a little child Samson felt something mysterious stirring in his soul, ay, and in his physical nature. Samson needed extraordinary gifts for extraordinary work. He had, single-handed, by his own solitary prowess, to cow the Philistines and reanimate the courage of the Hebrews. Two things were needful for him: (1) extraordinary strength, (2) inextinguishable joyousness. To hold his own amid the abject depression of the people round about him it was essential that he should be possessed of exuberant mirth and jollity. It is the men that do the most serious and earnest work that can play and romp and laugh with their children. That is not the noisy laughter of the fool. (3) Once again; it may be that asceticism is demanded for our age, just as Nazaritism was for Samson's. But that, remember, is the bad remedy of a still worse evil. Jesus Christ was no ascetic, else His enemies would not have published, as the likeliest scandal about Him, that He was a wine-bibber. (*Professor W. G. Elmslie.*)

Samson: inferior influences over large minds:—1. The Book of Judges is full of expressions of singular beauty. The springs of human action are bared and revealed to view with wonderful power. 2. Samson was inspired and sent forth with a heavenly mission. Yet second motive was the frequent spring of his actions. 3. There is a vigour, width, and absence of detail or accurate plan about his proceedings which stamp him still more as a man of genius and bold conception. 4. But there is a further remarkable feature in Samson's case. He became the slave of his wife. The same mind around which a mother wound the soft coils of maternal and home influences a wife bound round with the adamantine chains of female plot and management. 5. But we have to account for this and see its force. (1) In ordinary terms Samson was a man of genius. Genius is a more direct gift from God than the ordinary power of man. It is a species of inspiration. It sees the means of deliverance from an evil without having to wade through the tortuous windings of the labyrinth of hard-worked plans and schemes. (2) The man of genius is left with the simplicity of a child from never having commenced his hard task in the school of experience and difficulty. He leans with the trust of infancy on the natural stays and supports of life. Men of genius will be subject to the tyranny as well as consolations of inferior influences; and will often become the slaves and victims of female narrowness and punctilio. Their dependence on natural affections is accounted for by the same cause which accounts for their sometimes unaccountably sinking under the extravagant exercise of that influence. Not having had the need to manage others by elaborate plans, they are duped by overmanagement, and not having been called

on to work out schemes, they fall the ready and easy victims to those devised by others. 6. We are often startled by inconsistencies in Samson's history. They may be accounted for by the same reason—genius. The man of genius is not therefore of necessity a man of personal holiness. The glass tube may be the medium of streams of water, yet not one drop will imbue the substance forming the channel that conveys the fertilising drops from one spot to another. The eternal truth which a man speaks, the holiness he may bear witness to, the warnings he may proclaim, may all be declared with the utmost efficiency, and yet not influence him who is the medium. (*E. Monro, M.A.*) The Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times.—*Man under the influence of the Divine Spirit:*—Our knowledge of that mysterious power called the Spirit has been assisted by the well-known comparison of it with the wind, whose effects we may see, but whose rise and courses we cannot trace. "The wind bloweth where it listeth," &c. There will, therefore, be in human life occurrences that we can only refer to this source, which will defy scientific rules and be beyond calculation. But though we may not search out the way of the Spirit, we may inquire when His motions are most generally first felt. Is there any limit of age at which His visits begin or end? Are we to wait till riper years, when knowledge is matured and the passions subdued to reason, before we can entertain them, or may we expect this power of God to approach us early, and move us almost as soon as the age of consciousness begins? So much more receptive is the earlier part of a man's life that I have heard experienced preachers allege that no conversions take place after twenty-five; but while objecting to such a limit, or indeed any limit, I would maintain that in the young rather than in the old there is the best hope of feeling this power and becoming obedient to it. We may take Samson's life as evidence of what a man can dare and do under the influence of the Spirit. His strength was not his own, it was "hung in his hair," in the seven mysterious locks in his head, which would be to him of sacramental character, outward signs of an invisible gift. The Spirit really in him accomplished his feats. When the lion roared against him, it was "the Spirit of the Lord" that came mightily upon him; when he finds himself among his enemies bound with two new cords, at their shout "the Spirit of the Lord" again came mightily upon him, and he burst the cords which became as "flax which was burnt in the fire," and on this occasion he slew a thousand men. The view I take, then, of Samson's life is, that it was a witness to God's Spirit from the beginning to the end. We should lose much of the teaching of it if we believed that such a career is altogether out of date. I do not mean, of course, that the same feats of strength will be witnessed again, but I assert that heroic feats of physical courage will be done, greater feats, too, of moral courage; and some such it will be good to put before you for imitation. In every generation they are to be found, and in our own not less than others. And for such an illustration in our own day one naturally turns to our latest modern hero, Gordon, whose life is almost as strange and eventful as that of any of the heroes of Hebrew history, and none the less inspired. He himself traced his superhuman faith and energy to this source, to God working in him, enabling him to attempt any venture in His service and cheerfully to die for Him. What a victory is scored to faith, for however eccentric his conduct may be thought, plainly he has demonstrated that there are unseen powers that sway a man's heart much more forcibly than any motives of the world. Such men almost equal Samson in the apparent inadequacy of their equipment and neglect of means. But no doubt they fortify themselves with the argument that God loves to use trivial means to effect great ends—a small pebble in David's hand to bring down a giant, an ox-goad in Shamgar's hand to work a national deliverance, a stone, rough from the mountains, to overthrow Nebuchadnezzar's Colossus; and, thus encouraged, without scientific weapons, such as our theological armouries supply, they have gone forth strong in faith alone. I am led on to commend as a priceless possession the gift of an independent spirit in thinking and acting, such as the Judge in Israel always displayed among his fellow-men. For this is a servile age in which we live—albeit declared to be one of liberty and progress. Yet tending, as everything does, to democracy and equality, few men have the courage of their opinions, few that are not ready to make a surrender of their intelligence and conscience at the bidding of others. Where are the strong men who will act independently according to really patriotic or godly motives, and not put up their principles to a bidding? Who now in England is "valiant for the truth"? Who is upholding it before the people? Hitherto the grander part of Samson's character has occupied us, but there was a weak side when the strong man was brought low through a temptation that has cast down

many strong men. The prison house, with the fallen hero, deprived of sight, shorn of his noble locks, grinding as a slave, the scoff of the enemies of God, is an obvious allegory that hardly needs an interpretation, for it is alas! a picture of every day's experience when a spiritual man yields to those lusts which war within him, and enslave him if they prevail against him. (*C. E. Searle, M.A.*) *Samson, the Judge* :—It was a dark time with Israel when the boon of the future Danite judge was vouchsafed to the prayers of the long barren mother. It seems not unlikely that this may have been a part of that evil time when the ark of God itself fell into the hands of the hosts of Philistia. But there was a dawning of the coming day, and from this utter subjection God was about ere long to deliver His people. Samson was to be a first instrument in this work—he was to "begin to deliver Israel out of the hands of the Philistines" (chap. xiii. 5). To enable him to fulfil this peculiar ministry, the possession of extraordinary physical strength, accompanied by an unequalled daring, were the special gifts bestowed upon him. These began early to manifest themselves. From the first they are traced back in the sacred record to the working of that exceptional influence which rested upon him as a "Nazarite unto God." In spite of actions which seem at a first glance to us Christians irreconcilable with such a spiritual relation, the occurrence of his name under the dictation of the Spirit in the catalogue of worthies "who through faith subdued kingdoms, stopped the mouths of lions, escaped the edge of the sword, waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armies of aliens" (Heb. xi. 32–34), establishes beyond a doubt the fact that he was essentially a faithful man. As we look closer, we may see that passing signs of such an inward vitality break forth from time to time along the ruder outlines of his half-barbarous course. Surely there is written large upon the grave of the Nazarite judge, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God." There are those in whom, in spite of remaining infirmities, there is a manifest indwelling and inworking of God the Holy Ghost—men whose lives are rich with the golden fruit of His inward life. Their life, without a word spoken, has an untold influence upon others. Be they young or old, they are God's witnesses, God's workmen. Far outside these is another circle. These are men of whom it is not possible to doubt that the Spirit of God "has begun to move them at times." There are plain marks of a hard struggle going on within them; more or less they are conscious of it themselves. The good they would they do not, the evil they would not that they too often do. Perhaps their youth is stained with something of the waywardness, the sensuality, and disorder which marked that of the Nazarite Samson; and yet there is another Spirit striving within them. What a strife it is! with what risks, with what issues! The master temptation of one may be to yield the Nazarite locks of the purity of a Christian soul to the Philistine razor of sensual appetite; to another it may be to surrender to the fair speeches, or perhaps the taunts, of some intellectual Delilah, the faith which grew up early in his heart; his simple trust in God's Word, in creeds, in prayers, in Christ Incarnate. "Trust to me," the tempter whispers, "this secret of thy strength, and I will let thee rest at peace and enjoy thy life in victorious possession of all that thy mind lusteth after." It is the old promise, broken as of old. Beyond that yielding what is there for him but mockery and chains, eyelessness and death? And yet, once again, another class is visible. There are those who, though the Nazarite life is theirs, show to the keenest searching of the longing eye no token of any moving by the blessed Spirit. In some it is as if there had never been so much as a first awakening of the Spirit's life. In others there is that which we can scarcely doubt is indeed present, active, conscious resistance to the Holy One. This is the darkest, dreariest, most terrible apparition which this world can show. Here, then, are our conclusions. 1. Let us use, simply and earnestly, our present opportunities, such as daily prayer. Let us regularly practise it, in spite of any difficulties. Let us watch over ourselves in little things even more carefully than in those which seem great. 2. Let us guard against all that grieves Him. 3. Let us each one seek from Him a thorough conversion. In this thoroughness is everything—is the giving the heart up to God, is the subduing the life to His law, is all the peace of regulated passions, all the brightness of a purified imagination. (*Bp. S. Wilberforce.*) *Samson* :—Of Samson it may be said that he stands alone in the whole round of Scripture characters. The gift of supernatural bodily strength was bestowed on no other of God's servants. In this respect he is interesting, as furnishing one of the many varieties of form in which God, who spoke to the fathers at sundry times and in divers manners, sought to impress

upon them the great lessons of His will. Like Jonah, Samson was a sign to Israel. His life was a sort of parable, exhibiting in a strange but striking form what would have been their experience if they had been faithful. Like the nation of Israel, Samson was consecrated to God. The remarkable thing in his experience was, that while he continued faithful to his consecration he enjoyed such wonderful bodily strength, but the moment that the Nazarite law was broken, he became weak as other men. The nation was taught, symbolically, what wonderful strength would be theirs if they should be faithful to their covenant. On the other hand, the life of Samson set forth with equal clearness, what would be the consequences to Israel of their neglecting their consecration or treating lightly its marks and tokens. There was, however, a third point in which Samson was a type for Israel. Great though the judgment was that punished his neglect, he was not quite abandoned in his captivity. The hair of his head began to grow. The outward tokens of his consecration began to reappear. It was thus indicated to Israel that if, in the midst of judgment and tribulation, they should bethink them of the covenant God and seek to return to Him, He would in mercy return to them, and grant them some tokens of His former blessing. In these respects the career of Samson was peculiar. In addition to this, we are perhaps to view him, in common with the other judges, as typically setting forth the great Deliverer—the Lion of the tribe of Judah. In one respect Samson was quite specially a type of Christ. He was the first of the Hebrew worthies who deliberately gave his life for his country. Many risked their lives, but he actually, and on purpose, gave his, that his country might reap the benefit. Only here, too, we must remark an obvious difference. Both achieved salvation by dying, but in very different ways. Samson saved in spite of his death, Jesus by His death. Let us now glance at the salient points of his career. In his early training he presented a great contrast to Jephthah. In a very special sense he was a gift of God to his family and his nation; and the gift was made in a very solemn manner, and under the express condition that he was to be trained to live not for himself or for his family, but for God, to whom he was consecrated from his mother's womb. And no doubt he was brought up with the strictest regard to the rules of the Nazarites. Yet we may see, what was probably very common in these cases, that while he was rigidly attentive to the external rules, he failed to carry out, in some very essential respects, the spirit of the transaction. In heart he was not so consecrated as in outward habit. The self-pleasing spirit, against which the vow of the Nazarite was designed to bear, appeared very conspicuously in his choice of a wife. "Get her for me," he said to his father, "for she pleaseth me." The thought of her nation, of her connections, of her religion, was overborne by the one consideration, "she pleaseth me." This does not look like one trained in all things to follow the will of God, and to keep the sensual part of his nature in strictest subjection to the spiritual. True, it is said, "the thing was of the Lord"; but this does not imply that it carried His approval. It entered as an element into God's providential plans, and was "of the Lord" only in the sense in which God makes the devices of men to work out the counsel of His sovereign will. Yielding at the outset of his life, and in a most vital manner, to an impulse which should have met with firm resistance, Samson became the husband of this Philistine stranger. But it was not long ere he found out his lamentable error. The shallow qualities that had taken his fancy only covered a faithless heart; she abused his confidence and proved a traitor. And after he had had experience of her treachery he did not cast her off, but after a time sought her company, and it was only when he learned that she had been given to another, that he dashed into a wild scheme of revenge—catching the two hundred foxes, and setting fire to the growing corn. Whatever we may say of this proceeding, it showed unmistakably a very fearless spirit. The neighbouring tribe of Judah was horrified at the thought of the exasperation the Philistines would feel and the retribution they would inflict, and meanly sought to surrender Samson into their hands. Then came Samson's greatest achievement, well fitted to cow the Philistines if they should be thinking of reprisals—the slaughter of the thousand men with the jaw-bone of an ass. Like one inspired, Samson moved alone against a whole nation, strong in the conviction that God was with him, and that in serving Him there could be no ground for fear. But the old weakness returned again. The lust of the flesh was the unguarded avenue to Samson's heart, and despite previous warnings, the foe once more found entrance here. It is a lust that when it has gained force has a peculiar tendency to blind and fascinate, and urge a man onwards, though ruin stares him in the face. Other lusts, as

covetousness or ambition, or the thirst of gold, are for the most part susceptible of control; but let a sensual lust once prevail, control by human means becomes impossible. It dashes on like a scared horse, and neither bridle, nor cries, nor efforts of any kind, can avail to arrest its course. So it proved in the case of Samson. He seemed to rush into the very jaws of destruction. How sad to see a grand nature drawn to destruction by so coarse a bait!—to see a wonderful Divine gift fallen into the hands of the enemy, only to be made their sport. Sad and lamentable fall it was! Not merely a great hero reduced to a slave, not merely one who had rejoiced in his strength afflicted by blindness, the very symbol of weakness, but the champion of his nation prostrate, the champion of his nation's faith in the dust! It would seem that his affliction was useful to Samson in the highest sense. With the growth of his hair, the higher principles that came from above grew and strengthened in him too. He remembered the destiny for which he had been designed, but which appeared to have been defeated. He was humbled at the thought of the triumph of the uncircumcised, a triumph in which the honour of God was concerned, for the Philistines were praising their god and saying, "Our god hath delivered our enemy into our hands." Oh, if he could yet but fulfil his destiny! It was to vindicate the God of his fathers, to save the honour of his people, and to secure to coming generations the freedom and happiness which he himself could never know, that he laid himself on the altar and died a miserable death. Thus it appears that Samson was worthy of a place among those who, forgetful of self, gave themselves for the deliverance of their country. Let the young be induced to aim at steady, uniform, consistent service. It is awful work when the servants of God get entangled in the toils of the tempter. It is humbling to have but a blotted and mutilated service to render to God. Happy they who are enabled to present the offering of a pure life, a childhood succeeded by a noble youth, and youth by a consistent manhood, and manhood by a mellow and fragrant old age. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.

"Root, and stem, and blossom undefiled."

Samson shows us with painful clearness what havoc and misery may flow from a single form of sinful indulgence, from one root of bitterness left in the soil. (*W. G. Blaikie, D.D.*) *Samson's gift*:—I. HERE WAS A MAN OF SURPASSING PHYSICAL STRENGTH. His distinction was, that in splendour of muscle and sinew none could approach him, and hence his popularity and the high position he acquired. In a later age and a more advanced state of society it would not have enthroned him thus. But these are the earliest masters, these are the primitive heroes, the men who can do great things with their limbs. Afterwards, the dominion is taken from them and given to the largest brains. Now, Samson was simply mighty in muscle and sinew. Unlike most of the other judges he does not appear to have possessed the slightest military genius or enterprise, nor any power of combining his countrymen in opposition to their enemies, or inspiring them with spirit and desire to fight for liberty. There was no generalship in him, and no gift for leading. He had but massive, magnificent limbs, and went in, straightway, for applying them to the help of Israel without caring or aiming to be more and other than heaven had qualified him to be. Is it not a grand thing always to perceive the line along which we can minister, and to be willing to pursue it, and able to keep to it, however narrow or relatively inferior it may be. Not a few would be more successful and more useful than they are were they but more bravely content to be themselves—did they but accept more unreservedly the talent committed to them, and study more simply and independently to be faithful to it. Samson's gift was not much, was not of the highest kind. It was far below that of other judges in Israel, nor did it produce any great results. Is it not possible that the reported mighty deeds of the redoubtable Nazarite of Dan had something to do in moving Hannah to set apart her boy, the boy for whom she had prayed, to be a Nazarite from his birth? Samson may have contributed to give to Israel the greater Samuel. "I, too," he had stirred the woman in Mount Ephraim to say to herself—"I too, would fain have a son devoted to work wonders in the cause of God's people; let me make sacred for the purpose this new-born babe of mine!" and out of that came, not a mere repetition of the same wonder-working strength, but something infinitely superior —even the wisest, noblest, and most powerful judge the land had ever seen.

And so, often, they who are doing faithfully, in quite a small way, on quite a small scale, may be secretly conducive to the awakening and inspiring of grander actors than themselves. There are those who, with their rough and crude performances, with their honest yet blundering attempts, with their dim guesses and half-discoveries, do prepare the way, and furnish the clue for subsequent splendid successes on the part of some who come after them. II. But observe WHAT SAMSON'S COUNTRYMEN THOUGHT OF HIS AMAZING PHYSICAL STRENGTH, AND HOW IT IMPRESSED AND AFFECTED THEM. They ascribed it to the Spirit of the Lord: "The Spirit of the Lord came upon him." That was how they looked at it. Their mountains were to them more than mountains, they were the mountains of the Lord, and the might of their mighty men was the might of the Lord. It is worth cherishing, this old Hebrew sense of the sacredness of things; it helps to make the world a grander place, and to enhance and elevate one's enjoyment of all skills and powers displayed by men. Samson's chief value lay, perhaps, after all, in the one inspiring thought which his prowess awakened—the thought that God was there; for it is a blessed thing to be the means of starting in any sluggish, despondent, or earth-bound human breast some inspiring thought. Good work it is, and great, to be the instrument of putting another, for a while, into a better and holier frame, of leading him to be more tender, more patient, more finely sympathetic, or more believing in the Divine government of things, and in the reality of the kingdom of God. (*S. A. Tipple.*)

Samson:—All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. Especially God teaches us by recording lives of men and women like ourselves, and leaving them there with their lessons staring us in the face. I. Consider, then, HOW LOW GOD'S PEOPLE HAD FALLEN THROUGH THEIR UNFAITHFULNESS TO HIM, and their many departures, though they had only been a short time ago brought into a land flowing with milk and honey. Ammon, Midian, and Moab had all conquered them in turn. Now it was the Philistines, with a little country bordering on the sea coast, and with five chief cities, and yet they oppressed God's people! They would not let them have any weapons, and their very ploughs had to be sharpened at a Philistine forge. They constantly made raids upon them. It was a sore humiliation when Germany marched right up to Paris, dictated terms to the conquered in their own great Palace at Versailles, and made them pay heavily before they would go home. But suppose it had been Belgium! And yet Philistia answered somewhat to that: so low and weak do men become when they depart from the living God. But then it was that the Lord in wrath remembered mercy, and sent them Samson, a mighty deliverer. Deborah and Barak had delivered them before. Gideon and Jephthah had kept up the bright succession, and now Samson entered into it, and for a long time made the Philistines tremble. Never were such wonders known as he wrought, and the oppressions of the Philistines soon came to an end. O sunny, strong, stout-hearted Samson, how much good you might have done if you could have ruled yourself as well as conquering your foes! But there he failed, and so all was a failure. He was a Nazarite, and so never took any wine, according to the Nazarite vow, and yet he was completely overcome by the lusts of the flesh. It was not in vain that the net had been spread in the sight of the bird. He had seen the wicked Delilah and the savage Philistines spreading it together, and had been taken in it just the same. The same razor that cut his hair, the sign of his strength, could have cut his throat at any time. But for a few months he lingered on in penitence and prayer, whilst his hair grew once more—the sign, though not the source, of his strength. And then came a great day in Gaza, when they gathered to glorify their god Dagon in thousands. So with one tremendous effort of his new-found strength down came the columns, and down came the temple, and down came the people, and "the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life." So when they thought themselves most secure their sport was turned to woe, and in an hour when they looked not for it their destruction came. II. But now let us look at SOME OF THE LESSONS WHICH THIS REMARKABLE STORY IS DESIGNED TO TEACH. 1. And the obvious one on the face of the whole narrative is the poor figure that mere physical strength cuts. There are three sorts of strength—physical, intellectual, and spiritual—and the greatest of these is spiritual. If this be lacking, the other two are of little use. Later on, Solomon was an example of how mental power is of little worth without true godliness. Samson is an example of great strength of body, but he becomes the fool and the plaything of

wicked women. There is a great deal of attention paid to physical strength to-day, but it is a poor thing at the best. "Bodily exercise profiteth little, but godliness is profitable unto all things." We may have very strong muscles and very weak resolutions, and when the greatest strength is secured it is very inferior to that of the gorilla. God only "began" to deliver Israel in Samson's day, it is significantly said. The real and effective deliverance came later on, when Samuel, the wise and the good, judged Israel for a long time, and David carried on his moral and spiritual reformation. 2. But, further, let us never rely on certain moralities if we are failing in obedience to God. Samson was not devoid of all spiritual strength. He was a Nazarite from his birth, and the vow of the Nazarite, of which he is the first example, included abstinence from wine and all similar drinks. There is a false sympathy as well as a true, and its influence is to misinterpret and condone evil. So we are perpetually told by a certain class of writers that Charles I. may have been a great public sinner, but he had excellent private virtues. He may have been, as declared in his sentence, "a tyrant, a traitor, a murderer, and a public enemy," but he was a good husband and a good father. He broke his coronation oath a hundred times, but then he always kept his marriage vow. He was an awful tyrant, but he took his little son on his knee and kissed him. He was a dreadful liar, but he went to the prayers in his chapel sometimes at six in the morning. So, well may Lord Macaulay exclaim, "If in the most important things we find him to have been selfish, cruel, and deceitful, we will take the liberty to call him a bad man, in spite of all his temperance at table and all his regularity at chapel." 3. Let us remember that the badge of our consecration is largely the pledge of our strength. 4. Yea, let the very Dagon-worshippers teach us some such lesson. When Samson was caught, like some wild beast, they all gathered together to do honour to their fish-god Dagon. It was nothing to do with Dagon, but instead of honouring Delilah and the lords of the Philistines who had enticed her, they had a great assembly to do honour to their god. They said, when they saw Samson, "Our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy, and the destroyer of our country, which slew many of us." There was not quite enough of this in Samson, even when he had his strength. When he slew his thousand Philistines it was, "I have done it." Yes, we may often learn from those that have not our light. The Mohammedans believe many a lie and strong delusion, but this is what Mr. Wilson says of them in "Uganda and the Egyptian Soudan": "These Arabs are most regular in performing their devotions, even on the march. I noticed frequently sand on their foreheads, chins, and noses, from their prostrations during prayers. The sand is never wiped off, as it is considered a mark of honour on a believer's face." Oh, let us keep before us the true mercies and blessings of the true God, and pay our vows unto the Most High! (*W. J. Heaton.*) *From weakness to strength*:—That child was a dedicated child. Could any parent have a child, and not dedicate it? Could that parent be a Christian? Deal with that little child not as a plaything, but as a holy thing given you of God, and which you have given back to Him. Remember it, my children! You are God's child. Your body, your mind, and your soul belong to God. Remember it in your play, in your studies, when you get up in the morning. This "child" was still a growing child, when "the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times." God takes the initiative with us in everything; and there is no age so tender, and no thought or feeling so simple, but the Holy Spirit may be there. Is there a boy or a girl who could not say that they have thoughts, whispers, little inward voices, drawings of heart, which they have felt and knew to be of God? You will observe that "the moving of the Spirit" is placed immediately after "and the Lord blessed him." The "moving" is the "blessing." We should do well if we always looked at a good thought when it comes and say, "This is God blessing me. This thought is a benediction." You may notice that "the moving" was not only dated as to time, but dated as respects the exact place. So important a "moving" is, in God's sight. "The Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol." How precise! If we could see that register in heaven, we should find them all there in distinct order—the exact when, and the exact where, the Holy Spirit comes to us. It would be a solemn thing to confront that register. Have you kept any account? We often try; but the number will outstretch all our arithmetic! Doubtless it was "strength" which the "moving of the Spirit" gave to the young Samson. Strength is a special gift of the Holy Ghost. His operations are always strengthening. It is what we all, in our great weakness,

particularly want; and therefore He particularly supplies. For we have to deal with very strong things—a strong will; a strong besetting sin; a strong tide of evil in us and about us; a strong invisible foe! We have to be very thankful that He who said, "Be strong!" has placed it among the offices of the Holy Ghost to "stablish, strengthen, settle" us. (*J. Vaughan, M.A.*)

CHAPTER XIV.

VERS. 1–20. **Samson went down to Timnath.**—*Samson's first love*:—In considering Samson's choice of a wife, we are conscious of a feeling of painful disappointment. In choosing a Philistine, we begin to see his lower nature acting the tyrant. But it were well if domestic history in modern times did not present many instances of similar stubbornness. In such matters, the fancy of young people is often the supreme law. Samson's falling in love was in the ordinary way: "And he saw a woman of Tinmath," and "she pleased him well." We do not wonder that his pious parents were astonished at his wish to take a Philistine woman to wife. They were national enemies. And the angel had said he should deliver Israel. They would therefore naturally inquire, "How is this? Is our deliverance to begin with an alliance? We are not to touch anything unclean; our child is a Nazarite; and yet he wishes to marry a heathen! This is the beginning of the riddle." "Is there never a woman among thy brethren?" is the natural inquiry of such a father and mother. As he was so especially consecrated to God, it must have seemed peculiarly improper for him to make such an alliance. In seeking a Philistine wife, even in the most favourable view we can take of the affair Samson was treading on doubtful and dangerous ground. Their law expressly forbade the Israelites to marry among those nations that were cursed and devoted to destruction. It does not appear, however, that the Philistines were numbered among the doomed Canaanites. They were of Egyptian origin. The spirit of the Hebrew law, however, was plainly against such alliances, for the Philistines were idolaters and foreigners. It is true the law that forbade an Israelite to marry a heathen was a ceremonial law, or a police law—one that related to their national policy. It was not one of the laws of the decalogue. It was not a moral law. It might therefore be changed or suspended. But if the Divine prohibition against such an alliance was repealed for the time, making for special reasons his case an exception, how is it that the historian does not inform us of this fact? Why does not Samson tell his parents that the law is repealed in this case? There is not even a hint of any such thing. The match was of his own seeking. But God, seeing Samson's choice, determined to bring good out of it—he determined that his attachment to a Philistine woman should be overruled, so as to be the occasion of his beginning to deliver Israel. (*W. A. Scott, D.D.*) *Samson's marriage*:—1. That the people of God are liable to imperfections. They are human, though partakers of grace. 2. That our lusts and passions are to be resisted. Scenes of temptation ought to be avoided, and our greatest earthly joys ought to be regarded by us as pregnant with temptation, and be carefully watched. 3. That care should be taken in forming friendships or alliances. 4. That a crooked policy does not eventually profit. Samson's wife burnt by those to whom she betrayed her husband. 5. That God frequently works good out of evil; and that God's purposes are frequently accomplished by means of persons and events apparently least adapted, or even most opposed. 6. That though God may pardon our sins, their consequences in this life are frequently irremediable. The Spirit of God came again upon Samson, but his eyes were never restored, and he perished in the destruction of his enemies. (*J. Bigwood.*) *The choice of a wife*:—Samson, the giant, is here asking consent of his father and mother to marriage with one whom they thought unfit for him. He was wise in asking their counsel, but not wise in rejecting it. Excuseless was he for such a choice in a land and amid a race celebrated for female loveliness and moral worth, a land and a race of which self-denying Abigail, and heroic Deborah, and dazzling Miriam, and pious Esther, and glorious Ruth were only magnificent specimens. There are almost in every farmhouse in the country, in almost every home of the great towns, conscientious women, self-sacrificing women, holy women; and more

inexcusable than the Samson is that man who, amid all this unparalleled munificence of womanhood, marries a fool. That marriage is the destination of the human race is a mistake that I want to correct. There are multitudes who never will marry, and still greater multitudes who are not fit to marry. But the majority will marry, and have a right to marry; and I wish to say to these men, in the choice of a wife first of all seek Divine direction. The need of Divine direction I argue from the fact that so many men, and some of them strong and wise, have wrecked their lives at this juncture. Witness Samson and this woman of Timnath! Witness John Wesley, one of the best men that ever lived, united to one of the most outrageous of women, who sat in City Road Chapel making mouths at him while he preached! Especially is devout supplication needed, because of the fact that society is so full of artificialities that men are deceived as to whom they are marrying, and no one but the Lord knows. By the bliss of Pliny, whose wife, when her husband was pleading in court, had messengers coming and going to inform her what impression he was making; by the joy of Grotius, whose wife delivered him from prison under the pretence of having books carried out lest they be injurious to his health, she sending out her husband unobserved in one of the bookcases; by the good fortune of Roland, in Louis's time, whose wife translated and composed for her husband while Secretary of the Interior—talented, heroic, wonderful Madame Roland; by the happiness of many a man who has made intelligent choice of one capable of being prime counsellor and companion in brightness and in grief—pray to Almighty God that at the right time and in the right place He will send you a good, honest, loving, sympathetic wife; or, if she is not sent to you, that you may be sent to her. But prayer about this will amount to nothing unless you pray soon enough. Wait until you are fascinated and the equilibrium of your soul is disturbed by a magnetic exquisite presence, and then you will answer your own prayers, and you will mistake your own infatuation for the voice of God. If you have this prayerful spirit you will surely avoid all female scoffers at the Christian religion; and there are quite a number of them in all communities. What you want, O man! in a wife is not a butterfly of the sunshine, not a giggling nonentity, not a painted doll, not a gossiping gadabout, not a mixture of artificialities which leave you in doubt as to where the sham ends and the woman begins, but an earnest soul, one that can not only laugh when you laugh, but weep when you weep. As far as I can analyse it, sincerity and earnestness are the foundation of all worthy wifehood. Get that, and you get all. Fail to get that, and you get nothing but what you will wish you never had got. Don't make the mistake that the man of the text made in letting his eye settle the question in which coolest judgment directed by Divine wisdom are all-important. He who has no reason for his wifely choice except a pretty face is like a man who should buy a farm because of the dahlias in the front door yard. There are two or three circumstances in which the plainest wife is a queen of beauty to her husband, whatever her stature or profile. By financial panic, or betrayal of business partner, the man goes down, and returning to his home that evening he says: "I am ruined! I am in disgrace for ever! I care not whether I live or die." After he ceases talking, and the wife has heard all in silence, she says: "Is that all? Why, you had nothing when I married you, and you have only come back to where you started. If you think that my happiness and that of the children depend on these trappings, you do not know me, though we have lived together thirty years. God is not dead and if you don't mind, I don't care a bit. What little we need of food and raiment the rest of our lives we can get, and don t propose to sit down and mope." The husband looks up in amazement, and says, "Well, well, you are the greatest woman I ever saw. I thought you would faint dead away when I told you." And, as he looks at her, all the glories of physiognomy in the Court of Louis XV. on the modern fashion-plates are tame as compared with the superhuman splendours of that woman's face. There is another time when the plainest wife is a queen of beauty to her husband. She has done the work of life. She has reared her children for God and heaven, and though some of them may be a little wild, they will yet come back, for God has promised. She is dying, and her husband stands by. They think over the years of their companionship, the weddings and the burials, the ups and the downs, the successes and the failures. They talk over the goodness of God, and His faithfulness to children's children. She has no fear about going. Gone! As one of the neighbours takes the old man by the arm gently and says: "Come, you had better go into the next room and rest," he says, "Wait a moment; I must take one

more look at that face and at those hands! Beautiful! Beautiful!" (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) **It was of the Lord.**—*God overrules evil for good:*—1. This verse has been very strangely and very unfortunately misunderstood by many. It has been thought to mean—(1) That Samson was moved by the Spirit of God to desire this marriage; and—(2) that Samson desired to enter into it for the purpose of finding occasion to quarrel with the Philistines. 2. This view seems open to three fatal objections. (1) The silence of Samson about any such movement of the Spirit of God. (2) It makes God inspire Samson to go contrary to the spirit of His own law. (3) It is opposed to the whole spirit of the narrative, which impresses one with the idea that Samson was sincere in his passion. 3. The marriage was of God, as the conquest of Nebuchadnezzar or the treachery of Judas, inasmuch as He permitted it and overruled it for bringing Samson into collision with the Philistines, and introducing him to the grand work of his life. (*Thomas Kirk.*) **A young lion . . . and he rent him.**—*Bodily strength:*—1. Physical strength is not an index of moral power. That this man was mighty the lion and the Philistines found out, and yet he was the subject of petty revenges, and was ungianted by base passion. Oh! it is a shame that so much of the work of the Church and the world has been done by invalids, while the stout and the healthy men, like great hulks, were rotting in the sun. Richard Baxter, spending his life in the door of the tomb, and yet writing a hundred volumes and starting uncounted people on the way to the saints' everlasting rest. Giants in body, be giants in soul! 2. Strength may do a great deal of damage if it is misdirected. To pay one miserable bet which this man had lost, he robs and slays thirty people. As near as I can tell, much of his life was spent in animalism, and he is a type of a large class of people in all ages who, either giants in body, or giants in mind, or giants in social position, or giants in wealth, use that strength for making the world worse instead of making it better. Who can estimate the soul-havoc wrought by Rousseau going forward with the very enthusiasm of iniquity and his fiery imagination affecting all the impulsive natures of his time? Or wrought by David Hume, who spent his lifetime, as a spider spends the summer, in weaving silken webs to catch the unwary? Or by Voltaire, who marshalled a host of sceptics in his time and led them on down into a deeper darkness? 3. A giant may be overthrown by a sorceress. 4. The greatest physical strength must crumble and give way. He may have had a longer grave and a wider grave than you and I will have, but the tomb was his terminus. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *Brawn and muscle consecrated:*—We are often told that people must give account for their wealth, and so they must; and they must give account for their intelligence, and so they must; but no more than they must give account for the employment of their physical organism. Shoulder, arm, brain, knee, foot, all the forces that God has given us—are we using them to make the world better or make it worse? Those who have strong arms, those who have elastic step, those who have clear eye, those who have steady brain, those are the men who are going to have the mightiest accounts to render. What are we doing with the faculties that God has given us? (*Ibid.*) *Resist the devil:*—Sudden, surprising danger is brought before us here. How true that is of the life of young men still. Are there not temptations that leap upon us—spiritual wickednesses that come upon us unawares? This Samson was going down to Timnath on thoughts of love intent, never dreaming of such danger. A young lion roared against him. I thank God for the roar—for the sins that are unmistakable. You know where you are. But what are we to do with such temptations? First of all, do not run. Samson had great strength; he could stand and fight till his weapon clave to his fist; but I rather think running was not in his line. There was only one thing—death or victory; and he ran all risks, and flung himself on the brute. So with certain sins. Do not dally with them; do not dodge—you cannot. Do not try, as some one has said, to think them down. It is utterly impossible; it is neither philosophical nor anything else. There is just one thing to do—accept them. Take them as they are, in all their ugliness and all their ferocity, and do not be afraid, but by faith and prayer imbrue your hand in their blood. Grip them, bring them out, face them, and slay them before the Lord. And do it quickly; make sure work of it—no half-work of these lusts, like springing lions, that war against the soul. See how heaven and earth are mingled in that conflict. In order to tell this story completely, you have to bring in the supernatural—"The Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him." Now, that control by the Spirit must be known by us; His power must be experienced. Without Him ye can do nothing. Without

Him, the lion-like temptations, or the snake-like temptations, will lay hold of you and destroy you. But with the Spirit of God you are invincible; you have got the secret of the old warrior in classic story, who as often as he touched mother-earth found his strength return to him. "Stand," says Paul. "How?" you ask. "Praying always, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit," he replies. But notice further, "there was nothing in his hand." No sword, no staff. An adumbration, a hint of the New Testament again: "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but spiritual." To the eye of sense, the most defenceless babe in London is the young fellow, full of flesh and blood, who wants to hold the faith and fear of Jesus Christ. Wonder of wonders! He is not defenceless. Marvel of marvels, joy of heaven, disappointment of hell, he is not overcome! There are men and women to-day living a kind of salamander life; living in the flame, with the roar of the lion, and the hiss of the serpent, and the rattle of the snake, for ever in their ears; and they are not dead yet, and they never shall be. Yet they have "nothing in their hands." How, then, do they live when others are pinned to the earth? The Spirit of the Lord is with them. "He told not his father or mother what he had done." For a young Christian that is very helpful. Samson had his fine points about him. Like a great many other giants, he was a modest fellow. He bore his honours meekly. You may be like Samson. You may be a deal stronger and brighter than your fellows, and you may be able to cope with difficulties that overwhelm others. Cope with them, and hold your tongue. Perhaps you have escaped a lot of things that others have not escaped. But remember Samson. He did not halloo; and it well became him, for he was not out of the wood. Take care; there is no cause for fear; but there is no cause for boasting. Then another word from the eighth verse: "After a time he returned, and he turned aside," &c. The picture is Samson going on eating that sweetmeat, and being refreshed by it; and you see at once the application of it. Sin faced, mastered, becomes a very eating and drinking as we go on our way. See how the believer's path is a path going on from strength to strength. Crucifying the flesh is honey-sweetness. Do this to your temptations: get at the honey in the heart of their carcase when you have slain them; thereby reading Samson's riddle, "Out of the eater comes forth meat, and out of the strong comes forth sweetness." (*J. McNeill.*) *The sweet memory of triumph:*—1. The victory over the lion of unbelief. 2. The lion of temptation. 3. The lion of a rebellious spirit. 4. Death, the last enemy, shall also be vanquished. (*T. Davies.*) **He told not his father or his mother.**—*Estrangement from home influences:*—All this was bad and dangerous. For by the constitution of what I take to have been his passionately kind and cordial, as well as most murderously resentful nature, he must have company and friends, and even confidants; and not finding them at home, he must go and seek them out for himself abroad, and be thus ever in danger of casting himself into the arms of those who lure him only to destruction. If you are taking up with other friends more readily, and are begun already to be more communicative to other counsellors out of doors, shutting your mouth, because you are more than willing now to shut your ears to such godly counsel as, both by their natural anxiety and their Christian vows, they find it incumbent on them to give—if you feel impatient of such restraint, and would even presume to treat it not a little imperiously, having chosen for yourselves counsellors of another spirit, and more likely to concur with the desires and devices of your own heart, which are many, then just see here how like sleepwalkers, with eyes glistening and staring wide, yet visionless as the blind, are you treading now on the very brink of that hidden gulf, into which if you fall but once, it may be never to rise again. (*John Bruce, D.D.*) **Honey in the carcase.**—*Honey out of the dead lion:*—I. IT IS THROUGH DIVINE STRENGTH THAT VICTORIES ARE WON. 1. The Spirit of the Lord came mightily on Samson. God trains men for the work they have to do; if they are to be deliverers, saviours, then their training shall be physical—as in the case of Samson; his conflict with the lion would prepare him for repeated encounters with the Philistines. 2. It was when Samson was about to enter public life that the Spirit of the Lord came upon him. It is in the freshness of youth, before the mind is saturated with worldliness and the heart incrustated with selfishness, that there are Divine visitations. II. LIFE IS THE HISTORY OF VICTORY AND DEFEAT. A man may slay a lion, but have no control over himself; he may be physically strong, but morally weak. Many of our defeats are to be traced to our self-confidence and self-love, to our forgetfulness of God. If we have won any victories, they are to be traced to Divine grace

and strength. III. PAST VICTORIES ARE NOT TO BE FORGOTTEN. On a subsequent occasion Samson turned aside to see the lion he had slain. God will not have us forget the past, or the way by which we have reached our present position (Deut. viii. 2–5). All our Sabbaths, and sacraments, and sermons, are always saying to us, "Thou shalt remember." They remind us of the great victory gained for us by the Captain of our salvation, in which we are permitted to claim our part. IV. WE GET STRENGTH AND ENCOURAGEMENT FROM THE REMEMBRANCE OF PAST VICTORIES. If ever you have slain a lion, be sure that eventually it will yield you honey. You have overcome doubt—you have strengthened faith. You have vanquished sin—you have increased holiness. You have conquered fear—you have gained strength. We learn, too, that there is a Divine power ever at work in this world. From the secret place of thunder come forth the streams that make glad the world. The light is born in darkness. Good comes out of evil. (*H. J. Bevis.*) *Hands full of honey*:—What a type we have here of our Divine Lord and Master, Jesus, the conqueror of death and hell! He has destroyed the lion that roared upon us and upon Him. He has shouted "Victory!" over all our foes. To each one of us who believe in Him He gives the luscious food which He has prepared for us by the overthrow of our foes; He bids us come and eat, that we may have our lives sweetened and our hearts filled with joy. The Samson type may well serve as the symbol of every Christian in the world. I. THE BELIEVER'S LIFE HAS ITS CONFLICTS. Learn, then, that if, like Samson, you are to be a hero for Israel, you must early be inured to suffering and daring in some form or other. 1. These conflicts may often be very terrible. By a young lion is not meant a whelp, but a lion in the fulness of its early strength; not yet slackened in its pace, or curbed in its fury by growing years. Fresh and furious, a young lion is the worst kind of beast that a man can meet with. Let us expect as followers of Christ to meet with strong temptations, fierce persecutions, and severe trials, which will lead to stern conflicts. These present evils are for our future good: their terror is for our teaching. 2. These conflicts come early, and they are very terrible; and, moreover, they happen to us when we are least prepared for them. Samson was not hunting for wild beasts; he was engaged on a much more tender business. He was walking in the vineyards of Timnath, thinking of anything but lions, and "behold," says the Scripture, "a young lion roared against him." It was a remarkable and startling occurrence. Samson stood an unarmed, unarmoured man in the presence of a raging beast. So we in our early temptations are apt to think that we have no weapon for the war, and we do not know what to do. We are made to cry out, "I am unprepared! How can I meet this trial?" Herein will the splendour of faith and glory of God be made manifest, when you shall slay the lion, and yet it shall be said of you that "he had nothing in his hand"—nothing but that which the world sees not and values not. 3. I invite you to remember that it was by the Spirit of God that the victory was won. We read, "And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid." Let the Holy Spirit help us in our trouble, and we need neither company nor weapon; but without Him what can we do? II. THE BELIEVER'S LIFE HAS ITS SWEETS. What is more joyful than the joy of a saint! 1. Of these joys there is plenty. We have such a living swarm of bees to make honey for us in the precious promises of God, that there is more delight in store than any of us can possibly realise. There is infinitely more of Christ beyond our comprehension than we have as yet been able to comprehend. How blessed to receive of His fulness, to be sweetened with His sweetness, and yet to know that infinite goodness still remains! 2. Our joys are often found in the former places of our conflicts. We gather our honey out of the lions which have been slain for us or by us. There is, first, our sin. A horrible lion that! But it is a dead lion, for grace has much more abounded over abounding sin. "I have blotted out thy sins like a cloud, and as a thick cloud thine iniquities." Here is choice honey for you! The next dead lion is conquered desire. When a wish has arisen in the heart contrary to the mind of God, and you have said, "Down with you! I will pray you down. You used to master me; I fell into a habit and I was soon overcome by you; but I will not again yield to you. By God's grace I will conquer you"—I say, when at last you have obtained the victory such a sweet contentment perfumes your heart that you are filled with joy unspeakable, and you are devoutly grateful to have been helped of the Spirit of God to master your own spirit. Thus you have again eaten spiritual honey. III. THE BELIEVER'S LIFE LEADS HIM TO COMMUNICATE OF THESE SWEETS. As soon as we have tasted the honey of forgiven sin and perceived the bliss that God has laid up for His people in Christ Jesus, we

feel it to be both our duty and our privilege to communicate the good news to others. Here let my ideal statue stand in our midst: the strong man, conqueror of the lion, holding forth his hands full of honey to his parents. We are to be modelled according to this fashion. 1. We do this immediately. The moment a man is converted, if he would let himself alone, his instincts would lead him to tell his fellows. 2. The believer will do this first to those who are nearest to him. Samson took the honey to his father and mother, who were not far away. With each of us the most natural action would be to tell a brother or a sister or a fellow-workman, or a bosom friend. It will be a great joy to see them eating the honey which is so pleasant to our own palate. 3. The believer will do this as best he can. Samson, you see, brought the honey to his father and mother in a rough-and-ready style, going on eating it as he brought it. Carry the honey in your hands, though it drip all round: no hurt will come of the spilling; there are always little ones waiting for such drops. If you were to make the gospel drip about everywhere, and sweeten all things, it would be no waste, but a blessed gain to all around. Therefore, I say to you, tell of Jesus Christ as best you can, and never cease to do so while life lasts. 4. But then Samson did another thing, and every true believer should do it too: he did not merely tell his parents about the honey, but he took them some of it. If your hands serve God, if your heart serves God, if your face beams with joy in the service of God, you will carry grace wherever you go, and those who see you will perceive it. 5. Take note, also, that Samson did this with great modesty. In telling your own experience be wisely cautious. Say much of what the Lord has done for you, but say little of what you have done for the Lord. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) **He told not them that he had taken the honey.**—*Samson's silence respecting the honey*:—Two reasons may be given for it. 1. To secure that his parents might eat the honey. According to the ceremonial law, the honeycomb, from its having been in contact with a dead body, was unclean, and the likelihood is that, if the parents of Samson had known the fact, they would have refused to eat it. Such a motive for his silence would be indeed discreditable; but it does not seem likely that such minute particulars of ceremonial observance, in that degenerate period, would be present to the mind of a young man of about nineteen years of age. 2. The other reason—and probably the true one—is, that he might ensure the success of his riddle at the marriage feast. Samson was gifted with a quick wit and ready invention. He saw, as he walked along, how the circumstance of getting the honey out of the carcase of the lion might be turned into a riddle for the entertainment of his guests, and so, in order to make sure that no inkling of it might get abroad, he resolved to keep it a secret. He was manifestly a young man who could keep his own counsel. (*Thomas Kirk.*) **I will now put forth a riddle unto you.**—*Samson's riddle*:—By the goodness of God those things which once appeared unpleasant or injurious become real blessings. 1. This general observation may be applied to those painful convictions and apprehensions which sometimes harass the minds of beginners in religion. Many who have felt the deepest sorrow for sin have afterwards possessed the greatest degree of religious joy, and have "loved much, because they knew that much was forgiven." Thus, then, "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness." 2. The same may be said of divers temptations with which a Christian may be exercised. 3. It is the lot of many, of very many good people, to be poor. Yet, even here, they gather honey from the carcase of the lion; for their various troubles give occasion for the exercise of humble resignation to the sovereign will of God. Constant dependence upon God is thereby promoted. Thankfulness is another fruit of sanctified affliction; for such is the ingratitude of our hearts, that we are scarcely sensible of the value of our mercies but by the loss or suspension of them. Another advantage which may be gained from poverty is, that the Christian is led to seek the things that are above. 4. Apply this sentiment to the person who is grievously afflicted with severe pains and bodily afflictions. "We have borne chastisement; we will not offend any more," then is the purpose of Divine goodness in the visitation accomplished (Psa. cxix. 67, 71). 5. Domestic trials may produce the same advantages (1 Cor. vii. 29–31). 6. The same may be said with regard to disappointments in our worldly affairs. 7. Persecution is another of those evils to which the people of God are exposed. As long as there are men "born after the flesh," there will be hatred and opposition against those who are "born after the Spirit." But out of this unpromising lion sweet honey has been procured. 8. The subject may even be extended to death itself. The death

of Christ, though "according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God," was effected by the cruel hands of wicked men. But bitter as seemed this event to the disciples, what ever produced so much sweetness? Apply this also to the death of believers. Nothing to nature is so formidable as death; it is the king of terrors; and through the fear of it, many are all their lifetime subject to bondage. Such, indeed, is the carcase of the lion; but search and see: is there no honey within? Is there nothing to lessen the terrors of the tomb, and reconcile man to the grave? Yes; there is much every way: The sting of death is extracted. And not only so, but death is gain. The Christian leaves a troublesome world, a diseased body, a disordered soul, to be with Christ, to behold His glory, to be perfectly like Him. Conclusion: 1. Let us be led to adore the wisdom and goodness of God in bringing good out of evil. 2. On the contrary, it is painful to reflect on the state of worldly and wicked men, who are unhappily so entirely under the power of sin and Satan that they continually extract evil even from good. 3. What an argument may we derive from this subject for the commitment of ourselves and all our concerns into the hands of an all-wise and all-gracious God! (*G. Burder.*) *Fruits of conflict:*—I. In the HISTORY OF CIVILISATION we see how honey comes from the lion, rich fruitage from conflict. Men at first dwelt in caves. Navies were then only in forests, and railways in the mountains. Men's necessities goaded to effort. Even in Eden sinless man toiled; much more must sinful man toil. Think of the poverty and pains of Elias Howe, through long years of weary effort, before he perfected the sewing-machine; of the obscurity and penury out of which the great emancipator came who rent the lion of American slavery and rescued the slave; and of Him whom we worship as the Saviour of the race—if you would justly estimate the value and significance of disciplinary trial. II. THE CONFLICTS OF THE CHURCH illustrate the same. In the glens and on the moors of Scotland thousands have fallen martyrs in struggles against superstition, &c. III. INDIVIDUAL HISTORY. You are a business man. The prosperity you have has been gained by toil. These are the sweets that came from the lion of poverty and toil. You are a parent, and have suffered tribulation in the loss of dear ones. Good comes out of it if you love God, somehow, as purity comes to the atmosphere after the thunderstorm. I saw recently, in the gallery of the Royal Academy in Edinburgh, the face of St. Paul painted with an encircling cloud full of angels. It held me as no other picture, and I thought that every cloud which darkens the believer's way is full of angels, if he did but know it. Conclusion: There are three ways of conquering a foe—you may knock, talk, or live him down. Choose the last. Though others are bad, be yourselves good. (*C. Easton.*) *The wedding riddle and tragedy:*—1. I do not see anything wrong in Samson making a feast, as the young men used to do. It belonged to the bride and her friends to say what its details should be. In so far, then, as he could comply with the customs of her people without sinning we find no fault. The Bible does not require us to be proud, mopish, rude, supercilious, or ill-behaved. The want of genuine politeness is no proof of true religion. 2. At weddings it was common to have games, riddles, and the like amusements. An old scholiast on Aristophanes is quoted by Dr. Clark as saying that it was "a custom among the ancient Greeks to propose, at their festivals, what were called *griphoi*, riddles, enigmas, or very obscure sayings, both curious and difficult, and to give a recompense to those who found them out, which generally consisted either in a festive crown or a goblet full of wine. Those who failed to solve them were condemned to drink a large portion of fresh water, or of wine mingled with sea water, which they were compelled to take down at one draught, without drawing their breath, their hands being tied behind their backs. Sometimes they gave the crown to the deity in honour of whom the festival was made; and if none could solve the riddle, the reward was given to him who proposed it." It were a much better way to spend our time at seasons of merry-making in expounding enigmas and riddles than in slandering our neighbours or in gluttony or excessive drink. At our weddings let there be entertainment for the mind, as well as employment for the palate. Our social habits and opportunities should be diligently employed in doing and receiving good. At the wedding all goes on merrily. Sport and play are in the ascendant. The cup-questions were as sparkling as the cups. Many were the passages at wit. At last Samson is aroused. He says, "I will propose a riddle." If they solve his riddle, he is to pay thirty changes of raiment. If they fail, they are to pay him one change of raiment apiece. Samson had an odd humour generally of pitting himself against great odds. No doubt he thought himself sure of victory.

3. The solution is given at the appointed hour. Josephus paraphrases the interview thus: "They said to Samson, 'Nothing is more disagreeable than a lion to those that light on it, and nothing is sweeter than honey to those that make use of it.' To which he replied: 'Nothing is more deceitful than a woman; for such was the perfidious person that discovered my interpretation to you." He meant, doubtless, that without the assistance of his wife they could not have told the riddle. And on this plea, he might have disputed whether they were entitled to the forfeit. 4. Though betrayed and badly treated, Samson scorns to complain, but goes right off to procure the means to pay his forfeit. He was neither a cruel husband nor a repudiator. 5. Samson's "anger was kindled, and he went up to his father's house." Anger is as natural as a smile. His wife's treachery was a just cause of anger, and his going up to his father's house at this time showed unusual prudence and forbearance. When he returned to Timnath to pay the forfeit, he seems not to have seen his wife. But lordly as Achilles, and quite as angry and proud in his self-consciousness of unmerited wrong and impulsive ferocity, he strides off home to his father and mother. It was not wise for him to trust himself in his wife's presence when the sense of his wrongs was so warm within him. "But Samson's wife was given to his companion, whom he had used as his friend." That is, she was given by her father and the chiefs of the town in marriage to his first groomsman. Although she had but little liberty in the matter, still no doubt she was glad the Hebrew was gone, and that she was the wife of his friend. How far Samson was justified in leaving his wife is not altogether clear from the text. Most probably he did not intend a final separation, although this was the result. (*W. A. Scott, D.D.*) *Samson's riddle*:—The pathway of life has many a lion in it, and our success and happiness depend very much on the way we deal with them. Nearly all the strongest men in our great cities had to encounter early poverty and hardships; their limited education was got at the cost of self-denial, but learning was all the sweeter when they found it in the carcase of the slain lion. Had there been no Samson in all such young men they would have been frightened by discouragement into a helpless obscurity. One of the Christian leaders in New York tells us that he never has found greater enjoyment in his fine library than he found in the second-hand book which he purchased with his first shilling and read in his father's rustic cabin. Every good enterprise has its lions. Things that cost little count little. When a handful of Christians undertake to build up a mission school in some wretched neighbourhood, or to build a church in some destitute region, they find difficulties "roaring against them" like the wild beast in the vineyard of Timnath. These obstacles endear their work to them. There is a spiritual enjoyment in the after-results of their hard toils that they never could have known if their work had been easier. A sermon heard in a frontier church, whose erection cost sharp sacrifice, after a ten-mile ride over a country road, has some honey in it to a hungry Christian. Did you ever face a lion in undertaking the spiritual reformation of some hardened sinner? And had you ever a sweeter banquet of soul than when you saw him sitting beside you at Christ's table? Even the performance of a duty which presented a disagreeable front has a peculiar satisfaction in it. Captain Hedley Vicars encountered a shower of scoffs from his brother officers in the Crimean army when he was first converted. But he put his Bible on his table in his tent, and stood by his colours. Henceforth, the lion was not only slain, but there was rich honey in the carcase when his religious influence became a power in his regiment. Life's sweetest enjoyments are gathered from the victories of faith. Out of slain lions come forth meat; out of conquered foes to the soul come its sweetest honeycombs. One of the joys of heaven will be the remembrance of victories won during our earthly conflicts. (*T. L. Cuyler.*) *Out of strength, sweetness*:—Strength and sweetness may be taken as in some way a formula of human perfection. They are qualities which may have a certain hidden connection and interdependence, and yet which men usually expect to find, not together, but apart. Sometimes it is the strength that makes upon us the first and deepest impression—as, for instance, in Luther, a man of gigantic force and grasp; before whose fixed will and undaunted perseverance the Papacy itself totters. And yet in the familiar talk which happily survives to tell what manner of man he was, how kindly he shows himself, how gentle, how full of domestic cheerfulness and mirth, how loving to little children! So perhaps in Luther's master, Paul, it is the strength which dared and endured so much that first makes its mark upon us: we marvel at the inexhaustible energy which founded so many

churches, traversed the civilised world hither and thither, survived such various hardships, could know no pleasure, enjoy no rest, so long as an opportunity remained of speaking a word or winning a soul for Christ. And yet, as we look more closely, we note how this restlessly energetic apostle is still the prophet—I had almost said the poet—of Christian love; keeps his sway over men's minds by the charm of sweetness. On the other hand, it is peculiar to that type of character which we call the saintly to make an impression of sweetness, which diverts attention from the hidden strength within: that St. Francis should draw hearts of like pulse to his own, and live the centre of a brotherhood of love, we can understand; while that he should be a power in the Church for centuries, begetting spiritual sons through generation after generation, is a fact that startles us into the search for its explanation. But the consummate instance of this kind of character is the Master Himself. In Him men see and feel the sweetness, but they have to learn the strength. They are swayed, but so gently that they are hardly conscious of the force, which nevertheless they are unable to resist. These examples are all taken from the high places of humanity: let us look a little nearer home. We may admit without any difficulty that there is a strength which has no sweetness in it; which puts itself forth and strives towards its own ends, without caring what other forces it jostles against, or even what hearts it tramples on; which, wholly self-centred, goes on its way with all the hardness which comes of pure and unalloyed selfishness. But whether such strength is not in its nature partial and incomplete, whether its very lack of sweetness does not argue a certain narrowness of scope and meanness of aim, I will rather ask than pause to prove. With all the finest strength we associate the idea of magnanimity; and what we call "greatness of mind" has in it precisely the quality which I attributed to the powers of nature, of being concerned with things on the largest scale, and yet easily and unconsciously bending to things on the least. This, however, is not the point to which I chiefly ask your attention; but rather that, though there is a sweetness of disposition, undoubtedly genuine and lovable after its kind, which does not co-exist with force of character, the truest and noblest sweetness is that which "cometh out of the strong." For this last is no mere yieldingness and flexibility of heart, which is willing to take men for their outward seeming and at their own valuation, but a keen and large discernment of what elements of nobleness are really in them; not a desire that the complicated machine of society should run smoothly, and unpleasant things be hidden out of sight, and a general pretence established that life holds no sin and is stained by no shame, but a true reaching forth towards the essential harmony in which all God's world is compact together, an aspiration after the peace which comes of all places filled and all rights respected. (*C. Beard, B.A.*)

CHAPTER XV.

VERS. 1–20. I verily thought that thou hadst utterly hated her.—*Wrong-doers naturally seek to justify themselves:*—This spirit of self-justification, which is generally associated with wrong-doing, appeared very early in the history of our race (Gen. iii. 12, 13). And the same spirit is commonly found still amongst all ranks and classes of wrong-doers. Frank and full acknowledgment of a wrong is exceedingly rare. In most cases the wrong-doer through self-love aims at making the wrong appear right, or as near to right as one may expect from fallible men; and in this endeavour to exonerate himself he is in great danger of blinding the eye of his conscience and tampering with the sanctities of truth. Hence it behoves us, in the interests of our moral nature, to abhor that which is evil and cleave to that which is good; and, when we have done wrong through weakness or the stress of temptation, frankly and at once to confess it. The person who does wrong and seeks to justify it, is morally on the down-grade. (*Thomas Kirk.*) **Now shall I be more blameless than the Philistines.**—*Infliction of wrong is sometimes overruled for the good of the sufferer:*—In the providence of God this great wrong freed Samson from the meshes of an unworthy alliance, and awoke him to the responsibilities of his position as the divinely-chosen champion of his people. And wrongs, even great and heartrending wrongs, are often permitted by God, sometimes for the purpose of rescuing Satan's slaves from his servitude, and sometimes for

the purpose of rescuing His own people from the enslaving power of some unworthy passion. The injustice which abounds in the world is not an unmixed evil. Tyrants, extortioners, dishonest merchants, and all sorts of wrong-doers to their fellow-men, are used by God for beneficent ends. They often constrain those who groan under the wrongs which they inflict to think of God and the things unseen and eternal, and to enter on a new and a divine life. Great wrongs from men often lead the sufferers to see and repent of the great wrongs which they have done against God. They have often been the means of breaking their moral and spiritual slavery, and bringing them into the liberty wherewith Christ makes His people free. And great wrongs have been the means not only of giving freedom to the slaves of sin and Satan, but also of purifying and ennobling the people of God. The great wrongs of the Babylonian captivity burnt out of the Jewish people the besetting sin of idolatry. The great wrongs which the apostles and the early Church had to endure at the hands of their wicked persecutors were, like the furnace to silver or gold, the means of their moral or spiritual refinement (Rom. v. 3, 4; 2 Cor. iv. 17). We may deplore and abhor the wrongs which are perpetrated in the world and on the Church; but let us also gratefully behold this silver lining in the cloud, which comes from the gracious overruling providence of God. (*Ibid.*) **Samson went and caught three hundred foxes.**—*Three hundred foxes in the corn:*—Surely it is not so unheard of and incredible a thing, to have collected such a number of these animals in ancient times, as to destroy the credibility and literality of our story, because it contains this statement about the foxes. Did not Sylla show at one time to the Romans one hundred lions? And Cæsar four hundred, and Pompey six hundred? The history of Roman pleasures, according to the books, states that the Emperor Probus let loose into the theatre at one time one thousand wild boars, one thousand does, one thousand ostriches, one thousand stags, and a countless multitude of other wild animals. At another time he exhibited one hundred leopards from Libya, one hundred from Syria, and three hundred bears. When the caviller settles his hypercriticism with Vopiscus's Life of Probus, and with Roman history generally, we shall then consider whether our story should be rejected as incredible because of its three hundred foxes. It has also been proved by learned men that the Romans had the custom, which they seem to have borrowed from the Phœnicians, who were near neighbours of the Philistines—if they were not Philistines themselves—of letting loose, in the middle of April (the feast of Ceres)—the very time of wheat-harvest in Palestine, but not in Italy—in the circus, a large number of foxes with burning torches to their tails. Is Samson's the original, or did he adopt a common custom of the country? The story of the celebrated Roman vulpinaria, or feast of the foxes, as told by Ovid and others, bears a remarkable similarity to the history before us, ascribing the origin of this Roman custom to the following circumstance: A lad caught a fox which had stolen many fowls, and having enveloped his body with straw, set it on fire and let it run loose. The fox, hoping to escape from the fire, took to the thick standing corn which was then ready for the sickle; and the wind blowing hard at the time, the flames soon consumed the crop. And from this circumstance ever afterwards a law of the city of Rome required that every fox caught should be burnt alive. This is the substance of the Roman story, which Bochart and others insist took its rise from the burning of the cornfields of the Philistines by Samson's foxes. The Judæan origin of the custom is certainly the most probable, and in every way the most satisfactory. (*W. A. Scott, D.D.*) **The Philistines . . . burnt her and her father.**—*The fate of Samson's wife an illustration of retributive justice:*—Samson's wife in trying to avoid Scylla fell into Charybdis. She betrayed her husband, because she feared her brethren would burn her and her father's house with fire, and yet by their hands she was burned with fire and her father also. It is still the rule of Providence, that as men measure to others so it shall be measured to them again. It should be eternally before our minds that true principle is the only expediency. All history, both sacred and profane, shows that the evil that men do in trying to escape by continuing to sin—by doing wrong to correct a wrong—always meets them sooner or later in their flight. Sin added to sin only enhances guilt. Those that hasten to be rich, by resorting to dishonest means, and have accumulated property by fraud, do not generally long enjoy it. They seldom retain their gains, and if they do, how can they enjoy them haunted with a guilty conscience? It is a singular and significant providence that so many of the inventors of means for taking the life of their fellow-men should have perished by their own inventions. Gunpowder was the death of its inventor;

Phalaris was destroyed by his own "brazen bull." The regent Morton who first introduced the "Maiden," a Scottish instrument of decapitation, like the inventor of the guillotine, perished by his own instrument. Danton and Robespierre conspired the death of Vergniaud and of his republican *confrères*, the noble Girondists, and then Robespierre lived only long enough to see the death of Danton before perishing himself by the same guillotine. (*Ibid.*) **The Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him.**—*How we may burst the bonds of sin:*—The descent of the Spirit of the Lord upon us is the grand power by which we may burst asunder the strongest cords of sinful habit with which we may be bound. These cords, with which men freely bind themselves, increase in strength as they advance in years. By an inexorable law of our moral nature, sinful habits become the more binding the more they are indulged. The drunkard of two years' standing is more enslaved by the love of drink than the drunkard of one year's standing, and less than the drunkard of five or ten. And the same is true of every evil habit. The longer men continue in sin, they strengthen the chains of their own enslavement. Men may be able, in their own strength of will, to free themselves from this and the other evil habit; the drunkard may become sober, the licentious chaste, the dishonest upright, and so on. There can be no doubt that many, by their unaided exertions, have reformed themselves, and become respectable and useful members of society. But even with regard to such moral reformation it is sometimes—may I not say frequently?—true, that men of themselves are unable to secure it. There are many drunkards, *e.g.*, who seem to lack the power of bursting the fetters with which the love of drink has bound and enslaved them. And what seems to be true of some in reference to particular vices is true of all in reference to the spirit of insubordination to the Divine will. All men are naturally rebellious; and this insubordination grows with our growth, and strengthens with our strength. But what is impossible to man in his own strength, in reference both to this spirit of rebellion and particular vices, is possible to man in the strength of the Spirit of God. Any man, the most enslaved, the most powerfully bound with the cords and fetters of sin and vice, may obtain his spiritual freedom. What he needs is that the Spirit of the Lord come mightily upon him, as He did upon Samson, and any man who sincerely prays for this wondrous endowment shall obtain it. This is the grand hope which Jesus Christ has brought to our race. (*Thomas Kirk.*) **The jawbone of an ass.**—*The rudest weapon not to be despised in God's service:*—When God has work for you to do, a conquest for you to make, a deliverance of others for you to effect, He will not leave you without a weapon; it may not always be a very promising one, but still a weapon. Samson might, no doubt, have slain more with a sword if he had had one; and so it is well that in all you do for God you provide yourself with as likely weapons as you can possibly get. But sometimes you find yourself, like Samson, in circumstances where you must act quickly, and where you cannot provide yourself with what you might think the best weapon, but must take the first that comes to hand. You are, *e.g.*, suddenly prompted by your conscience to say a word of rebuke to some profane or wicked person, or a word of warning to some one who is, as you know, casting off even ordinary restraints, and giving way to evil passions; but you feel your want of wisdom and fluency; you know you can never say a thing as it ought to be said—you wish you could, you wish you were well enough equipped for this, which you feel to be really a desirable duty. Now in such circumstances it is more than half the battle to attempt the duty with such weapon as we have, in the faith that God will help us. A rude weapon, wielded by a vigorous arm, and by one confident in God, did more than the fine swords of these men of Judah, who had no spirit in them; and in very much of the good that we are all called upon to do to one another in this world it is the spirit in which we do it that tells far more than the outward thing we do. And it is a good thing to be reduced to reliance, not on the weapon you use, but on the Spirit who uses you. Samson found it so, and gave a name to that period of his history where he learned this; and so does every one look back gratefully to the time when he distinctly became aware that efficiency in duty depends on God's taking us and using us as His weapons. (*Marcus Dods, D.D.*) *Samson's weapon:*—I. SAMSON FOUGHT THE BATTLE SINGLE-HANDED against three thousand men. It is a feature of God's heroes in all ages that they fight whether they are in the minority or the majority. God has wrought His greatest works through single champions. II. SAMSON FOUGHT WITHOUT THE USUAL WEAPONS OF WARFARE. The Philistines were armed, but he had no sword. Well, now, what did Samson do? A man that is raised by God for special work has keen eyes, as a rule. He sees

what there is about him and to what use everything can be put. This moist bone had all its natural strength in it. Samson laid hold of that. He knew what he was about, and what he could do with that weapon, and he turned it to terrible uses. III. SAMSON WON THE VICTORY WITH A POOR WEAPON. He was not one of those who excused himself for bad work by complaining about the tool he used. I have known some little boys at school, over whose copy books I have looked. When I have said, "Oh, here is a blot," they have replied, "Yes, but the ink bottle was too full." And so in many other instances I have noticed that bad writers blame the pens, and bad workers blame the instruments they have had to work with. If you see a bad carpenter, the plane is always wrong. On the other hand, if you see a good workman, he never blames his tools, but makes the best of them. (*D. Davies.*)

Shall I die for thirst?—*The fainting hero* :—My drift is the comforting of God's saints, especially in coming to the table of their Lord. I. YOU HAVE ALREADY EXPERIENCED GREAT DELIVERANCES. Happy is it for you that you have not had the slaying of a thousand men, but there are "heaps upon heaps" of another sort upon which you may look with quite as much satisfaction as Samson, and perhaps with less mingled emotions than his, when he gazed on the slaughtered Philistines. 1. See there the great heaps of your sins, all of them giants, and any one of them sufficient to drag you down to the lowest hell. But they are all slain; there is not a single sin that speaks a word against you. 2. Think, too, of the heaps of your doubts and fears. Do you not remember when you thought God would never have mercy upon you? "Heaps upon heaps" of fears have we had; bigger heaps than our sins, but there they lie—troops of doubters. There are their bones and their skulls, as Bunyan pictured them outside the town of Mansoul; but they are all dead, God having wrought for us a deliverance from them. 3. Another set of foes that God has slain includes our temptations. Some of us have been tempted from every quarter of the world, from every corner of the compass. There has not been a bush behind which an enemy has not lurked, no inch of the road to Canaan which has not been overgrown with thorns. But look back upon them. Your temptations, where are they? Your soul has escaped like a bird out of the snare of the fowler. 4. So, let me say, in the next place, has it been with most of your sorrows. Like Job's messengers, evil tidings have followed one another, and you have been brought very low. But, in Christ Jesus, you have been delivered. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all." II. YET FRESH TROUBLES WILL ASSAIL YOU, AND EXCITE YOUR ALARM. Thus Samson was thirsty. This was a new kind of want to him. He was so thirsty that he was near to die. The difficulty was totally different from any that Samson had met before. Now I think there may be some of you who have been forgiven, saved, delivered, and yet you do not feel happy. God has done great things for you, whereof you are glad, yet you cannot rejoice; the song of your thanksgiving is hushed. Let me say two or three words to you. It is very usual for God's people, when they have had some great deliverance, to have some little trouble that is too much for them. Look at Jacob; he wrestles with God at Peniel, and overcomes Omnipotence itself, and yet he goes "halting on his thigh!" Strange, is it not, that there must be a touching of the sinew whenever you and I win the day? It seems as if God must teach us our littleness, our nothingness, in order to keep us within bounds. III. If you are now feeling any present trouble pressing so sorely that it takes away from you all power to rejoice in your deliverance, remember that YOU ARE STILL SECURE. God will as certainly bring you out of this present little trouble as He has brought you out of all the great troubles in the past. 1. He will do this because if He does not do it your enemy will rejoice over you. If you perish, the honour of Christ will be tarnished, and the laughter of hell will be excited. What! a child of God forsaken of his Father! God will never permit the power of darkness to triumph over the power of light. 2. That is one reason for confidence, but another reason is to be found in the fact that God has already delivered you. I asked you just now to walk over the battlefield of your life, and observe the heaps of slaughtered sins, and fears, and cares, and troubles. Do you think He would have done all that He has done for you if He had intended to leave you? The God who has so graciously delivered you hitherto has not changed; He is still the same as He ever was. Bethink you if He does not do so He will lose all that He has done. When I see a potter making a vessel, if he is using some delicate clay upon which he has spent much preliminary labour to bring it to its proper fineness, and if I see him again and again moulding the vessel—if I see, moreover, that the pattern is coming out—if I know that he has put it in the oven, and that the colours are

beginning to display themselves—I bethink me were it common delf ware I could understand his breaking up what he had done, because it would be worth but little; but since it is a piece of rich and rare porcelain upon which months of labour had been spared ,I could not understand his saying, "I will not go on with it," because he would lose so much that he has already spent. Look at some of those rich vessels by Bernard de Palissy, which are worth their weight in gold, and you can hardly imagine Bernard stopping when he had almost finished, and saying, "I have been six months over this, but I shall never take the pains to complete it." Now, God has spent the blood of His own dear Son to save you; He has spent the power of the Holy Spirit to make you what He would have you be, and He will never stay His mighty hand till His work is done. "Hath He said, and shall He not do it? Hath He begun, and shall He not complete?" (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Samson's prayer*:—There are two facts in the prayer which Samson recognises and pleads with God. 1. One is that he is the Lord's servant: he describes himself as "Thy servant." Samson, in all his hostile acts against the Philistines, evidently regarded himself as doing the work for which God raised him up. 2. The other is, that his recent glorious victory, which was a wonderful deliverance not only to Samson but to his country, was due to God: "Thou hast given this great deliverance." And after stating these two facts, he uses them as a plea for the relief of his present distresses: "And now shall I die for thirst . . . ?" Surely God cannot allow such a disgraceful end to happen to His own servant, for whom He had wrought such a wonderful deliverance! (*Thomas Kirk.*) He revived.—*Spiritual renewal in answer to prayer*:—In this incident we may see an illustration of the principle on which God has acted towards His people in all ages. His promise is, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." The strength for to-day, like the manna of old, is only sufficient for the necessities of to-day; and if we would be equal to the duties of the morrow, or to any emergency that may arise, we must get fresh strength from the Lord. Without spiritual renewal, after exhausting labour or conflict, we shall become faint and ready to perish; so it is always with the mightiest spiritual warriors; but if we cry unto the Lord in our times of faintness, He will hear us, as He did Samson, and He will open up for us, not in the hollow of some desert place outside, but in the depths of our own parched souls, a spring whose pure living waters will gladden and revive our languid hearts. (*Ibid.*)

CHAPTER XVI.

VERS. 1–31. Then went Samson to Gaza.—*Pleasure and peril in Gaza*:—For what reason did Samson go down to Gaza? We imagine that in default of any excitement such as he craved in the towns of his own land, he turned his eyes to the Philistine cities which presented a marked contrast. There life was energetic and gay, there many pleasures were to be had. New colonists were coming in their swift ships, and the streets presented a scene of constant animation. The strong, eager man, full of animal passions, found the life he craved in Gaza where he mingled with the crowds and heard tales of strange existence. Nor was there wanting the opportunity for enjoyment which at home he could not indulge. A constant peril this of seeking excitement, especially in an age of high civilisation. The means of variety and stimulus are multiplied, and even the craving outruns them—a craving yielded to, with little or no resistance, by many who should know better. The moral teacher must recognise the desire for variety and excitement as perhaps the chief of all the hindrances he has now to overcome. For one who desires duty there are scores who find it dull and tame and turn from it, without sense of fault, to the gaieties of civilised society in which there is so little of the positively wrong that conscience is easily appeased. The religious teacher finds the demand for "brightness" and variety before him at every turn; he is indeed often touched by it himself, and follows with more or less of doubt a path that leads straight from his professed goal. "Is amusement devilish?" asks one. Most people reply with a smile that life must be lively or it is not worth having. And the Philistinism that attracts them with its dash and gaudiness is not far away nor hard to reach. It is not necessary to go across to the Continent, where the brilliance of Vienna or Paris offers a contrast to the grey dulness of a country village; nor even to London

where, amid the lures of the midnight streets, there is peril of the gravest kind. Those who are restless and foolhardy can find a Gaza and a valley of Sorek nearer home, in the next market town. Philistine life, lax in morals, full of rattle and glitter, heat and change, in gambling, in debauchery, in sheer audacity of movement and talk, presents its allurements in our streets, has its acknowledged haunts in our midst. Young people brought up to fear God in quiet homes whether of town or country, are enticed by the whispered counsels of comrades half-ashamed of the things they say, yet eager for more companionship in what they secretly know to be folly or worse. Young women are the prey of those who disgrace manhood and womanhood by the offers they make, the insidious lies they tell. The attraction once felt is apt to master. As the current that rushes swiftly bears them with it, they exult in the rapid motion even while life is nearing the fatal cataract. Subtle is the progress of infidelity. From the persuasion that enjoyment is lawful and has no peril in it, the mind quickly passes to a doubt of the old laws and warnings. Is it so certain that there is a reward for purity and unworldliness? Is not all the talk about the life to come a jangle of vain words? The present is a reality, death a certainty, life a swiftly passing possession. They who enjoy know what they are getting. The rest is dismissed as altogether in the air. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*) And went away with them, bar and all.—*Our Champion*:—Poor Samson! We cannot say much about him by way of an example to believers. He is a beacon to us all, for he shows us that no strength of body can suffice to deliver from weakness of mind. Samson is also a prodigy. He is more a wonder as a believer than he is even as a man. It is marvellous that a man could smite thousands of Philistines with no better weapon than the jawbone of a newly-killed ass, but it is more marvellous still that Samson should be a saint, ranked among those illustrious ones saved by faith, though such a sinner. St. Paul has put him among the worthies in the eleventh chapter of the Hebrews. I look upon Samson's case as a great wonder, put in Scripture for the encouragement of great sinners. If such a man as Samson, nevertheless, prevails by faith to enter the kingdom of heaven, so shall you and I. Though our characters may have been disfigured by many vices, and hitherto we may have committed a multitude of sins, if we can trust Christ to save us He will purge us with hyssop, and we shall be clean; and in our death we shall fall asleep in the arms of sovereign mercy to wake up in the likeness of Christ. I. LOOK AT OUR MIGHTY CHAMPION AT HIS WORK. You remember when our Samson, our Lord Jesus, came down to the Gaza of this world, 'twas love that brought Him; love to a most unworthy object, for He loved the sinful Church which had gone astray from Him; yet came He from heaven, and left the ease and delights of His Father's palace to put Himself among the Philistines, the sons of sin and Satan here below. There He lies silently in the tomb. He who is to bruise the serpent's head is Himself bruised. O Thou who art the world's great Deliverer, there Thou liest, as dead as any stone! Surely Thy foes have led Thee captive, O Thou mighty Samson! He sleeps; but think not that He is unconscious of what is going on. He knows everything. He sleeps till the proper moment comes, and then our Samson awakes; and what now? He has defeated death; He has pulled up his posts and bar, and taken away his gates. As for sin, He treads that beneath His feet: He has utterly overthrown it, and Satan lies broken beneath the heel that once was bruised. In sacred triumph He drags our enemies behind Him. Sing to Him! Angels, praise Him in your hymns! Exalt Him, cherubim and seraphim! Our mightier Samson hath gotten to Himself the victory, and cleared the road to heaven and eternal life for all His people! II. CONSIDER THE WORK ITSELF. We will stand at the gates of this Gaza and see what the Champion has done. He had three enemies. These three beset Him, and He has achieved a threefold victory. There was death. Christ, in being first overcome by death, made Himself a conqueror over death, and hath given us also the victory; for concerning death we may truly say, Christ has not only opened the gates, but He has taken them away; and not the gates only, but the very posts, and the bar, and all. Christ hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light. He hath abolished it in this sense—that, in the first place, the cause of death is gone. Believers die, but they do not die for their sins. The curse of death, then, being taken away, we may say that the posts are pulled up. Christ has taken away the after-results of death, the soul's exposure to the second death. There is no hell for you, believer. Christ has taken away posts, and bar, and all. Death is not to you any longer the gate of torment, but the gate of paradise. Moreover, Christ has not only taken away the curse, and the after-results of death, but from many of us He has taken

away the fear of death. He came on purpose to deliver "those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Besides, there is a sense in which it may be said that Christians never die at all. "He that liveth and believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." "He that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." They do not die; they do but "sleep in Jesus, and are blessed." But the main sense in which Christ has pulled up the posts of the gates of death is that He has brought in a glorious resurrection. If you have imagination, let the scene now present itself before your eyes. Christ the Samson sleeping in the dominions of death; death boasting and glorifying itself that now it has conquered the Prince of Life; Christ waking, striding to that gate, dashing it aside, taking it upon His shoulders, carrying it away, and saying as He mounts to heaven, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" Another host which Christ had to defeat was the army of sin. Christ had come among sinners, and sins beset Him round. Your sins and my sins beleaguered the Saviour till He became their captive. In Him was no sin, and yet sins compassed Him about like bees. Sin was imputed to Him; the sins of all His people stood in His way to keep Him out of heaven as well as them. I may say, therefore, that all our sins stood in the way of Christ's resurrection; they were the great iron gate, and they were the bar of brass, that shut Him out from heaven. Doubtless, we might have thought that Christ would be a prisoner for ever under the troops of sin, but oh, see how the mighty Conqueror, as He bears our sins "in His own body on the tree," stands with unbroken bones beneath the enormous load. See how He takes those sins upon His shoulders, and carries them right up from His tomb, and hurls them away into the deep abyss of forgetfulness, where, if they be sought for, they shall not be found any more for ever. Then there was a third enemy, and he also has been destroyed—that was Satan. Our Saviour's sufferings were not only an atonement for sin, but they were a conflict with Satan, and a conquest over him. Satan is a defeated foe. The gates of hell cannot prevail against the Church; but, what is more, Christ has prevailed against the gates of hell. As for Satan, the posts, and bar, and all have been plucked up from his citadel in this sense—that Satan has now no reigning power over believers. He may bark at us like a dog, and he may go about like a roaring lion, but to rend and to devour are not in his power. III. We will now see HOW WE CAN USE THIS VICTORY. Surely there is some comfort here. You have a desire to be saved; God has impressed you with a deep sense of sin; the very strongest wish of your soul is that you might have peace with God. But you think there are so many difficulties in the way—Satan, your sins, and I know not what. Let me tell thee, in God's name there is no difficulty whatever in the way except in thine own heart, for Christ has taken away the gates of Gaza—gates, post, bar, and all. They are all gone. Is not this an incentive for us who profess to be servants of Christ to go out and fight with the world and overcome it for Christ? Where Jesus leads us it needs not much courage to follow. "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof." Let us go and take it for Him! (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) **Tell me, I pray thee, wherein thy great strength lieth.**—*Man's cannot and man's can: A New Year's address:*—Man has the power to turn bad things to a good account, and it is lawful and right for him to do so. On this principle we shall use these words of a bad woman to a not very good man to illustrate the ability and the inability of man. I. THE INABILITY OF MAN; OR WHAT HE HAS NO "STRENGTH" FOR. 1. He cannot destroy the actions of his life. 2. He cannot bring back the neglected opportunities of his life. 3. He cannot blot out the sins of his life. 4. He cannot arrest the course of his life. 5. He cannot destroy the influence of his life. II. THE ABILITY OF MAN; OR, WHAT HE HAS "STRENGTH" FOR. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Through the moral strength of Christ man can—1. Reverse the ruling impulse of his past sinful life. 2. Make amends for the pernicious influence of his past life. 3. Remove from his own soul the pernicious influence of his past life. 4. Turn the very scene of his earthly life into a heaven. (*Homilist.*) *The secret of Samson's strength:*—Samson was not transparent to the vision of those who were nearest him. His true nature was a riddle they could not solve. His phenomenal prowess was not written in the lines of a vast and unwieldy body, or, as imagined by some, in the flowing locks of his hair. It was no mere matter of exceptional physique, of massive thews and sinews, of Titanic proportions visible to every eye. There was more in him than met the eye, or the question would not have been repeated with such despairing urgency, "Tell me wherein thy great strength lieth?" Did it spring from the dignity and exaltation of his lot? Samson was a "judge" in Israel, the

"saviour" of his tribe, the liberator of his people, an "uncrowned king"; one of those elect military and moral leaders raised up in an era of gross barbarity and widespread lawlessness to repress irreligion and godlessness, subdue the foes of Israel, call the people back to truth, and goodness, and God, and prepare them for the acceptance of law and order at the hands of His earthly representative, a Divinely-given king. But Samson's strength lay no more in his position than in his body. He had to make his opportunity rather than to take it. Therefore, we repeat Delilah's inquiry and say—if neither in the limbs he used, nor in the place he filled, where then lay his great strength? I. The first response, with all the uniqueness and definiteness of inspiration, brings us face to face with God. The historian of the judges, with characteristic simplicity and directness, brevity and force, traces Samson's power, by one single and swift step, to Jehovah, and credits his marvellous triumphs to the mighty and immediate movements of the Divine Spirit. His birth is a Divine incident and his nurture the Divine care. He is reared according to the directions of God, and whilst still a young man "the Spirit of God moves him," "strikes" him repeatedly and with increasing force, as the smith hits and welds the glowing metal on the anvil with his hammer; "pierces him" through and through till his pain-born patriotism is unsupportable and he flings himself against the Philistines with the crushing weight of an avalanche. From first to last the hero's life is invested with the supernatural. Samson's power is moral, of the will and spirit, and not merely of bone and sinew. He is not a giant in body and a dwarf in soul. The Spirit of God is the underlying force of his character, and alone secures for him his rank in the long line of mediators of Divine truth, and agents of Divine revelation. II. Now what is attributed to God directly and at once in the Old Testament is set down to the credit of Samson's "faith" in the New; and accordingly this Divine hero takes his place in the long roll-call of conquering believers, along with Abel and Abraham, Jacob and Joseph, Deborah and David. The language changes, but the fact is the same. It is the view-point that differs. The historian is seated on high, and reads Samson's career from beside the throne of the Eternal. The key-note is the same; both are struck in the high spiritual realm, but the note has different names in the different notations of the old and new economies. In the former case the answer to the question reads, "Samson is of God, and has overcome them; because, greater is He than is in him, than he that is in the world"; whilst the second case is expressed in the language of the same writer: "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." But this is not all. The new description is itself a positive addition to our knowledge—another ray from the Sun of Revelation. The same people do not describe the same facts in different ways without a motive. Fresh forces of the Spirit are at work meeting the fresh needs of living and suffering men, in a fresh and living speech, addressed to the heart and life. "True eloquence," says one of our most recent seers, "is to translate a truth into language perfectly intelligible to the person to whom you speak." That is what the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews does. In a sustained stream of the purest and most exalted eloquence he translates the histories of Enoch and Noah, Moses and Samson, into the language of the Church and the street, brings them into vital touch with the feelings throbbing in the heart, and makes the Hebrew Christians to realise the unity of their lives, under the new and revolutionary conditions created by Christianity, with those of the fathers of the human race, the founders of the Hebrew nationality, and the prophets and leaders of the revelation of God. In becoming Christians they were not destroying the law and the prophets, but filling out their programme, advancing their ideals, and accomplishing their projects. We can only discharge our obligations to our age as we catch the spirit of the writers of the New Testament, make the use of the elder Christianity they made of Mosaism and Judaism, adopt a language that beats and throbs with the life of to-day, and so reveal the unity of human life, and of all ages in the living and loving God. III. Bringing Samson, then, out of the ancient Eastern world, and looking at him in the full blaze of all the lights that shine on human character in its making, and on human struggle in its success and failure, what is the answer yielded to the demand, "Tell me wherein thy great strength lieth?" 1. No despicable advantage, surely, was that with which our hero started life. His being was stored with force at his birth. He had an uncommon, I may say, for that day, a uniquely opulent inheritance. He was "born of a good family," though in a bad time; a family that dwelt at the topmost heights of spiritual consecration, had grandly dared in the midst of seething vice and irreligion to choose the most self-suppressing type of personal and domestic

life, and dedicate its energies to obeying the most strenuous law of living yet made known, even that of the Nazarite vow. No aspiration soared higher. No range of service was broader. No attitude was less open to question. No position made greater demands on courage, fidelity, and self-sacrifice. Can you estimate the spiritual wealth of such a descent? Have you any measure for the advantages of such a home? Would not every day be an acquisition of power, and may we not readily believe that as "the child grew the Lord blessed him"? Parentage and nurture are among the chief agents for continuing and advancing the spiritual welfare of the world; and so, whilst God was the fountain-head of all the power of Samson, one stream of the spirit-force assuredly came along the line of inherited sanctities and family training, constituting him the typical Nazarite, the chief example of that special phase of the Hebrew religion—at once of its splendid strength and of its possible weakness. 2. Again, Samson's Nazarism, practised from boyhood, nourished by a mother's watchful care, and intensified by his isolation from the rest of the world, must have exercised an incalculable power upon his mind, and fixed in the "porcelain" of his nature the faith that he had a supreme work to do for God, and was responsible to Him, till the last stroke was given. The man who means to do any real work in a brief life must know what not to do. Samson's vow was of signal service in teaching that. The root of his religion was separation, and his vow roused and stimulated his nature, opened his being to the access of God's Spirit with unresisted fulness and all-subduing might, developed the feeling of the sacred inviolability of his life, assured him he could not be hurt so long as he was faithful to his calling, and rendered him susceptible of that strength of will, heroic fearlessness, and resistless dash, which made him indomitable. Samson is a dedicated will; and once dedicated in will to God we are strong for God and by God. 3. The reputation of Samson has suffered from the grim humour marking some of his exploits and the gigantic and boisterous mirth that runs riot through some of his achievements. We men of the West set so high an estimate on strenuous earnestness, rigid intensity, and serious ardour, that we always prefer majesty to grace, sober sincerity to playful humour. The massive dignity and royal gravity of Milton win upon us, whilst the nimble pliancy and occasional sportfulness of Shakespeare are ignored. But we must not forget that great natures are rarely wanting in humour. Samson's natural cheerfulness; his light and cheerful temperament, sending forth a full buoyant river of mirth, was one of the sources of his strength, saving him from the weakness that, in a time of oppression and calamity, nurses care, frets away power, anticipates disaster, and wastes existence. Never quailing before the superiority of his foes, he is as sunny as he is strong, as bright as he is bold, and thus is able to husband his strength for the heaviest demand that the day may bring. Joy is a duty, and of priceless worth is the temperament that makes obedience easy, opening the soul to every genial ray that shines, and closing it to the access of brooding care and darkening anxiety. 4. It was one of the darkest hours in Israel's history. The tribes generally had lost heart and hope, and Judah was so disorganised that, instead of co-operating with Samson, they betrayed him into the hands of the common enemy. Here then was urgent need, and the need provoked and stimulated Samson's faith, as his vow had inspired it. Necessity was laid upon him. The Spirit of God moved him mightily by the sight of the work to be done, the widespread anarchy and confusion, and the vast suffering and misery. Consecrated souls are goaded to battle by the sympathetic pains they feel with the wronged and the oppressed. Oh, for the quick sympathy that sees in every lost soul a call to service, and in every national and social evil a Divine summons to a quenchless zeal in service for God and men! 5. But the function of Samson in revelation would be most imperfectly discharged for us if we did not recognise the teaching of his flagrant and ignominious fall. Nothing external, though it be the purest and best, can enable us "to keep the heights the soul is competent to gain." God, and God alone, is sufficient for continuous progress and final victory. (*J. Clifford, D.D.*) *Individualism in religion*:—The lesson of Samson's life is "Individualism in religion: what God can accomplish for His people by the power of a single arm." Wherein lay his strength? I. IN HIS EARLY CONSECRATION TO GOD. And just in proportion to the degree of our consecration will be the extent of our influence and success in the Divine service. We are weak in the ratio of what we reserve. Give up little for Christ, and we will accomplish little. Give up all, and we shall be more than conquerors through Him who loves us. II. IN DOING THE WORK ASSIGNED HIM. III. IN FIGHTING WITH THE WEAPON GIVEN HIM. IV. SAMSON WAS PREPARED TO DIE FOR HIS CAUSE.

And Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines." This was the Hebrew warrior's greatest and most heroic exploit. He gave his life for his country. (*R. Balgarnie, D.D.*) **His soul was vexed unto death.**—*The gradual and subtle advance of sin*:—That story of the blandishments of Delilah is compassed in a few verses, but as a matter of fact, I presume, it spreads over a considerable time. Delilah could not have overcome a man of native wit and ready perception like Samson by bringing those snares against him in a short period; but she might now, with soft, silent look, woo the secret from his heart; then, changing her humour, she would try the loving petulance of the toy of his love as she was: "How canst thou say thou lovest me, seeing thou withholdest this secret from me?" Then inch by inch she wearied out the strength of resistance, and then came that terrible catastrophe; but it was slow, very slow. He felt himself strong through it all, perchance; but because he felt himself strong, the snare was biting through the very joints of his harness; and when the day of danger and necessity came, it fell from off him, and left him a victim to the powers of the enemy. Now, you are an old man; white hairs are upon your head. Did you notice their growth? Did you notice how one by one they began to whiten? Did you not rather, the first day you noticed that symptom of coming age, pluck out the recreant hair and cast it aside as a mere accidental thing? But it grew notwithstanding, till it frosted your head. You see it is bleak, cold winter, and there is not a leaf to be seen, and the earth is bound up in its snowy coat; you never noticed how it stole in, and how bright, warm summer and the green leaves turned to the crispness of the sere and yellow leaf, and one by one dropped away, till at length winter came and killed the last leaf that fluttered in the cold wind. You did not notice this, but it came on. Or see yon noble berg that floats in the northern seas, and upon its pinnacled crown the bright spring sunshine plays till it lights it up into a diadem of glory. How majestically it floats upon the blue bosom of these waters! Then suddenly as in an instant you see that mighty diadem of crystal pinnacles plunge into the depths. Sudden? no, not sudden at all. Sudden in its collapse, sudden in its end; but the warm waters of the springtide far beneath the broad base which weighted it so well were lapping away its strength and melting down the icy surface, and then, when the gravity was just pitched over, it fell. So gradual is sin. You go on in all the joyousness of your sinnership; you glory that you at least have been free from all the grievous pestilences which hang about sin: aye, go on, and float down towards the south, and remember that the warm currents which you do not notice are eating out the strength of your life, and your fall will be sudden, in an instant, because you have not noticed its gradual approach. You do not notice that first sin; you feel that it has not produced any great impression upon you; but toils are being prepared, and inch by inch you are let down to the very edge. It is only taken to put back again; it is only keeping a little longer; it is only preparing the way for disgrace and exposure. It is only a light laugh at the corner of the street, and a merry innocent freak with a strange coy face that meets you. It is only tarrying a while to speak a word of ready and easy good-humoured jest. But her ways lead down to hell, and her end is in the grave. (*Bp. Boyd Carpenter.*) **If I be shaven, then my strength will go from me.**—*The giant's locks*:—I. LEARN HOW VERY STRONG PEOPLE ARE SOMETIMES COAXED INTO GREAT IMBECILITIES. Those who have the kindest and most sympathetic natures are the most in danger. The warmth and susceptibility of your nature will encourage the siren. Though strong as a giant, look out for Delilah's scissors. II. THIS NARRATIVE TEACHES US THE POWER OF AN ILL-DISPOSED WOMAN. While the most excellent and triumphant exhibitions of character we find among the women of history, and the world thrills with the names of Marie Antoinette and Josephine and Joan of Arc and Maria Theresa and hundreds of others, who have ruled in the brightest homes and sung the sweetest cantos, and enchanted the nations with their art, and swayed the mightiest of sceptres, on the other hand the names of Mary the First of England, Margaret of France, Julia of Rome, and Elizabeth Petrowna of Russia have scorched the eye of history with their abominations, and their names, like banished spirits, have gone shrieking and cursing through the world. Woman stands nearest the gate of heaven or nearest the door of hell. When adorned by grace she reaches a point of Christian elevation which man cannot attain, and when blasted by crime she sinks deeper than man can plunge. III. CONSIDER SOME OF THE WAYS IN WHICH STRONG MEN GET THEIR LOCKS SHORN. The strength of men is variously distributed. Sometimes it lies in physical development, sometimes in intellectual attainment, sometimes in heart force, sometimes in social position, sometimes in financial accumulation; and there

is always a shears ready to destroy it. Every day there are Samsons ungianted. I saw a young man start in life under the most cheering advantages. His acute mind was at home in all scientific dominions. But he began to tamper with brilliant free-thinking. Modern theories of the soul threw over him their blandishments. Scepticism was the Delilah that shore his locks off, and all the Philistines of doubt and darkness and despair were upon him. He died in a very prison of unbelief, his eyes out. Far back in the country districts there was born one whose fame will last as long as American institutions. His name was the terror of all enemies of free government. He stood the admired of millions; the nation uncovered in his presence, and when he spoke senates sat breathless under the spell. The plotters against good government attempted to bind him with green withes and weave his locks in a web, yet he walked forth from the enthralment, not knowing he had burst a bond. But from the wine-cup there arose a destroying spirit that came forth to capture his soul. He drank until his eyes grew dim, and his knees knocked together, and his strength failed. Exhausted with lifelong dissipations, he went home to die. It was strong drink that came like the infamous Delilah, and his locks were shorn. Evil associations, sudden successes, spendthrift habits, miserly proclivities and dissipation, are the names of some of the shears with which men are every day made powerless. They have strewn the earth with the carcases of giants, and filled the great prison houses with destroyed Samsons, who sit grinding the mills of despair, their locks shorn and their eyes out. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

Made him sleep upon her knees.—*The victim and the victor:*—I remember once walking with a man over a large mortgaged farm; the poor owner had fallen somehow in the rear of life; and some years before he had mortgaged the whole property. He began life badly, and when I knew him he had been past the prime of life, for some time ineffectually trying to overtake old mistakes. But it is a difficult matter for the wisdom of to-day to overtake the folly of yesterday. Thus a mortgaged life is far more affecting and hopeless than a mortgaged farm; and there are those who mortgage their lives, and they cannot redeem them. Some mortgage health by the excesses of intemperance. Oh, it is a sad spectacle, a man trying to overtake or trying to repossess a mortgaged life. Of course a nature like Samson's was especially in danger from women; and there were women in Sorek! His is the old story; so all these heroes fell. Thus it was with Hercules and Omphale; and Hercules, as we have said, was the strong Samson of the ancient classic world; his story is so like that of Samson that some have not unnaturally supposed it derived from Hebrew story. Omphale was the queen of Lydia, and Hercules fell in love with her, and became her slave for three years, and led an effeminate life in winding and carding wool, while Omphale wore the skin of the tremendous Nemean lion he had slain! What a parable! He had squeezed the lion to death; and Omphale pressed out his manhood in her embrace! Thus it was with Antony and Cleopatra; thus it was with Henry IV. of France. Few, like Ulysses, have passed in safety the isle of Syrens; few escape Calypso! One of the great masters of modern poetry has, with subtle and matchless power, in the "Idylls of the King," drawn in Vivien the very illustration of the history before us; you pity, you feel contempt for, the great prince lying there, his head in the lap of the Syren of Sorek; you cannot believe it! You say, "Did he not know?" You say, "Could there be such matchless folly? Could he surrender his secret?" Yes, wise men fall, great men fall! Notice the manner of Samson's fall; it was by the extortion of his secret; therefore has it been said, "Keep thine heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues," or, which is the same thing, within it is the secret of life. There are around us constantly those who seek to know our secret, the secret of our strength and of our weakness; for there is a dangerous secret, there is in all of us a charm; we know it. Surrender to others the charm, and they put it forth against us. And then the victim lies dead; "lost to life, and use, and name, and fame." You remember the wonderful dream of John Newton. He was, he thought, in the harbour of Venice, on the deck of a ship, when a stranger brought him a ring of inestimable value, giving him charge to keep it, because its loss would entail on him trouble and misery. The ring was accepted, and also the responsibility of keeping it; but while he was meditating on the value of the ring, a second person appeared. He talked to him about the supposed value and virtues of the ring; he laughed at the idea of its value, and, in the end, advised him to throw it away. He plucked it from his finger, and threw it into the sea. Immediately, from the Alps, behind Venice, burst forth flames; and the tempter, aughing, told him that he was a fool, that the whole mercy of God was in that

ring. He trembled with agony and fear, when a third person came, or the same who had first given him the ring; he blamed his rashness, but, exactly where the ring went down, he plunged, and brought it up again; instantly the Alps ceased their burning, and the seducer fled. He approached his friend, expecting to receive again the ring. "No," said his friend, "if you kept it, you would soon bring yourself into the same distress. You are not able to keep it; I will keep it for you, and produce it, when needful, on your behalf." A wonderful dream—do not doubt it. We all have something to keep—something precious. We must not let the enemy of our spirits steal our secret from us. Do you remember Samson in the lap of Delilah? Samson had his secret; "Show me," said the crafty woman, "wherein thy great strength lieth." But Samson kept his secret. "How canst thou say," said she, "I love thee, when thy heart is not with me?" So he gave up his secret; he parted with his heart. "Then, in one moment, she put forth the charm of woven paces and waving hands; and he lay as dead, and lost to life, and use, and name, and fame." Then they burst forth into laughter. "Ha! ha! ha! Samson, where is thy secret now? Ha! ha!" But he had parted with his heart; he had lost, he had mortgaged his secret. "And was lost to life, and use, and name, and fame." And what a spectacle is that of Samson asleep! Behold here the recklessness, the carelessness, of the tempted soul. There is but one thing more; the price of his ruin is paid, now awake him! "The Philistines be upon thee, Samson! And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the Lord had departed from him." He rouses, but all is lost! How strange it all seemed; how new! Where am I? What?" No man knows well the value of what he has had until he has lost it. A character gone! Young Weltly sat at his desk; a clerk came to him and said, "Weltly, Mr. Drummond, the principal, wants to speak to you." He went into the office; he knew! The principal looked to the inspector of police standing by. "There's your prisoner, sir." And the lost young man held out his hands mechanically for the handcuffs. Poor boy! they were not needed, but it was a lost life! So here strength is gone! character is gone! Israel has lost her hero! her hero has lost himself! He surrendered "the secret of the Lord," which is only "with them that fear Him," and awoke to find the Spirit of the Lord departed from him! (*E. P. Hood.*) *Samson shorn of his strength:*—Learn how it was that Samson was shorn of his strength. 1. Because he was not equally strong in all directions. 2. Because he ventured too far into temptation. Samson allowed Delilah to bind him with green withes, &c. "He laid his head in her lap," &c. Beyond a certain point retreat was impossible. 3. Because he relied upon his own strength. He did not realise that his strength was from God. It is a sad experience that teaches men what Philip Melanchthon learned at last, "that Satan was stronger than Philip." (*The Preacher's Monthly.*) I will go out as at other times.—*The evil of knowing evil:*—These were the words of a man once strong, who found, to his amazement, that he had, through his own fault, lost that in which his strength lay. What do you try to keep from your children? Is it not the knowledge of evil? Their innocence you feel to be their safety, as you know it is your admiration. You preserve it to them while you can. Why? Because when it is gone they are not the same. At best they go out as at other times before and shake themselves: they are not aware that, for a season at least, the Lord has departed from them. Their history is the universal history. I. THERE ARE, NO DOUBT, MANY SUBJECTS ABOUT WHICH WE HAVE LEARNED SOMETHING, AND ABOUT WHICH NEVERTHELESS WE KNOW VERY LITTLE AFTERWARDS, AND FEEL LITTLE INCLINATION TO MAKE EXPERIMENTS. This is, probably, the case with all sorts of studies except one; and that one varies in different persons. What would afford me extreme gratification might be to some one else a very wearisome pursuit; while his favourite subject would have no charms for me. And so he might have gained an insight into the nature of my pursuit, or I into the nature of his, without any danger of either of us injuring our prospects or losing our time by following the pursuit of the other to the neglect of his own. Now this safeguard, you will see at once, is wanting as regards the knowledge of evil. We have naturally a decided taste for wickedness. Here, then, is an answer to the common excuses for becoming unnecessarily acquainted with the evil that is being done in the world. It is admitted that the practice of sin is injurious. Well, the taste is so decided in your heart, that the likelihood of your stopping short and being satisfied with mere knowledge is reduced to almost nothing. In your own strength you surely cannot resist. Strength from on high how can you expect when you are tempting God? On what, then, are you to

depend to preserve you from going beyond knowledge if you once get it? On nothing. Then you had better not have the knowledge. II. But, besides this, IT IS A FACT IN OUR NATURE THAT THE DESIRE OF KNOWLEDGE IS CONNECTED WITH THE DESIRE OF SOCIETY. Now how will this work in the case under our consideration? The man who has acquired a knowledge of evil from pursuing it as a study, must seek for the society of those already acquainted with it, or of those not already acquainted with it. Of the former class—those already acquainted with it—how many of those he meets are likely to have stopped short at that point? and how many are likely to be satisfied so long as he stops short of it? But suppose, on the other hand, that the associates chosen be those to whom the knowledge of evil is new, and to whom it may be imparted. See what an infinity of mischief you are bringing about, even supposing—and it is a very wild supposition—that you avoid actually committing the sins about which you are so anxious to acquire and to impart knowledge! There is, literally, no end to the mischief. You have made yourself Satan's missionary. The effects of your first—perhaps thoughtless—effort you never can reverse. III. There is yet another important practical evil resulting from the knowledge of sins, even though we neither practise them nor speak of them; that is, THE TENDENCY OF SUCH KNOWLEDGE TO DEADEN IN OUR OWN MINDS THE SENSE OF SIN AS SUCH, TO DIVERT US FROM VIEWING IT AS SOMETHING UTTERLY ANTAGONISTIC AND ABHORRENT TO A PURE AND HOLY GOD, as something so bad that to save us from it Christ, who was very God, died on the Cross. There are very many cases where repentance seems doubtful not so much from an unwillingness to abandon particular acts of sin, as from, apparently, an utter incapability to comprehend the nature of sin itself. So difficult is it when once we have left the path of safety, which we trod with the Divine aid, to return to it again—so impossible to come back to it as we left it. In presumptuous security we part with the innocence which was the secret of our success, forgetting that our strength was dependent upon its preservation. In an unfounded conviction that at any time a little effort will restore us to the position which we wantonly abandon, we do wantonly abandon it and slumber unconscious of our loss, until at last, like Samson in the text, awakened from our sleep we say, "I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself"—not knowing that "the Lord is departed from us." No words of mine could at all convey to you my deep sense of the inestimable benefit of following all through life the injunction of the wise man, "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away." (*J. C. Coghlan, D.D.*) *As at other times*:—Now the story of Samson is told in this book, just in the characteristic fashion of Bible biography. There is nothing extenuated, and there is nothing concealed. Here you have the man as he is—in his strength and his weakness, in his right-doing and his wrong-doing. Now, in the story of Samson itself there is nothing very puzzling. The one puzzling thing about it is in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where we find this man canonised as one of the heroes of faith. Now, as we candidly read the story, we must confess that Samson does not seem to have very much religion about him. That unshorn hair was a solemn thing to him. It marked out a certain dedication of him to God, a certain separation of him among men. But so far as we can see that is all the religion that Samson had about him. Whence that verdict of the Epistle to the Hebrews? There is no doubt that Samson was possessed of a certain faith in the God of Israel, and in Israel's future, which did help to redeem his life from utter ignobleness, which did inspire him to make a part of that history that leads up to Christ. As I understand, that is all that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says. Samson is an illustration of how far a liberal, true, and noble faith will go to redeem what is essentially a poor life from utter ignobleness. Samson's life is far from that of inspiration and example. He is here rather as a signal warning. I daresay some of you are familiar with Milton's poem of Samson Agonistes. If so, let me remind you that the Samson of the Bible is not at all the Samson of the poem. Milton's tragedy depicts Samson as a stately, majestic, fallen hero, great and admirable in every respect, even in his overthrow. The Samson of the Book of Judges is quite another man. I do not think that he is, on the whole, a man whom you can possibly respect, though I think he is a man that you cannot possibly help liking. A boyish, sunny, radiant soul—keen for life as he understands it. Just the sort of man to be exposed to extra temptation by the very qualities that were fitted to make him so popular. Aye, we too need that natural and happy hopefulness in God's campaigns—and we have too little of it. We are too sour and grim, we who fight His battles. And yet, I think, there is a false ring in Samson's

laughter. There is just a touch of the crackling of the thorns under the pot, of the noisy laughter of the fool. The youth of him was the best of him; and that is a hard thing to say of any man. The strongest man of his day, he was about essentially the weakest man of his day. No doubt he did much to save his country; he began to save Israel from the Philistines. But himself he could not save. First of all, glance at his childhood and youth in Zorah, for that is the first chapter of his life. Now the story of Samson's birth is as beautiful and tender as a summer morning. And how mother and father resolve together that the life God would have their boy lead they, by God's grace, will help him towards. They will not take God's gift apart from God's purpose. They will not plan their boy's career to please themselves. And so, under these happy auspices, the boy is born, and under such a training he grows up in his happy youth until the time comes that, as an Israelite, he must take his responsible part in the burden and the pain of his people. And now I think we may entitle the second chapter, "Samson in the camp of Dan." There he has betaken himself, with his consecrated life, where the manhood of his tribe are wont to gather for military exercise, or perhaps for grave counsel concerning the public peril; for they seemed to be ever in peril in those days. There his forefathers, long ago, had established their camp. There was the ancestral burying-place of his people. There he felt himself moved nearer to all that was great and glorious in the world and in the history of his people. There we read "The Spirit of the Lord moved him in the camp of Dan." And I think that to all of us ere we took our plunge into life there came this same experience in some sacred spot when a vision was given us of the future that dawned so fair for us when we were children, but now shown so near, a vision of the heaving and wresting of immortal powers, of the battle between good and evil, between God and the world; and when we felt, oh, a great scorn of the world and the trivial and the selfish, and a great purpose to strike in and strike out on the right side—to be for God and for God's cause in this world, to win the glory that is of God. Well, well, the Spirit of the Lord, I venture to say, hath moved us all in the camp of Dan. And now we pass on to the third chapter, and we may entitle it "Samson in Gaza," or "Samson plunging into Life," or if you prefer, "Peril and Pleasure in Gaza." Gaza was the chief seaport of the Philistines, a great commercial city, a gay, pleasure-loving place, contrasting strikingly with the quiet monotony of the home-life in the tribe of Dan. And, although Samson's first visit to Gaza is first spoken of well on in his life, there is no doubt whatever that he had visited Gaza in early youth. Gaza lay very near to the camp of Dan, and there all that he had purposed and felt was to be put to the test. The fact is, there is no escaping Gaza for you and me. We have to mix with life. One ought, in one sense, to trust life utterly. You cannot believe too strongly in the good of life, and in all that you can get from life if you live it rightly. Yet, on the other hand, one is bound to say you must distrust life. Ah, it is life that undoes folk, and undoes them smilingly and tenderly, as Delilah undid Samson in Gaza. It is life that lays the unholy hand on the holy secret, that asks insinuatingly, "Tell me, tell me, wherein the secret of thy strength lies. Tell me what makes thee different from other folk. Tell me what prevents thee now from coming in with us. Tell me——" and wins the secret from us, laying the unholy hand upon the holy secret for the unholy purpose. So Samson in Gaza gives himself away. Not knowingly, mark you. He believed that even if he got into some kind of mess, he was strong enough to get out of it. He believed that he could touch the fire and not be burnt. Samson one day woke up finding he had made a mistake, but saying to himself, "Well, I must retrieve; I will go out as at other times, and resume my life." But he was never more to go out as at other times. He had gone too far; he had done it once too often; he had given way too much. Now, it seems to me that this is the teaching of Samson's life. The man had no principle, no definite and consecutive purpose in life. Even an inferior principle, even any kind of purpose, would have spared him much that he suffered. Why, one would rather have seen that man set himself to be a millionaire than drift as he did; one would rather see the man's heart given to gold than to Delilah. But the man had no purpose at all, he had no rudder to steer by. That man was doomed to drift upon the rocks, to make shipwreck of his life. Ah, what a strange and awful trust this life of ours is! It is the one thing that you must not play with. You must take it very seriously. The gift that God gives you, if you do not use it properly, it will undo you. "I will go out as at other times." That is the history of every temptation and of every failure. That is the encouragement every one applies to his soul, ere he goes into temptation.

You cannot do that. It cannot be with you as it was, you who have yielded to the temptress, you who have yielded to sin. Oh, then, you must come straight back to God, and get His forgiveness, and begin life again with His help. But be very sure you can never without that leave your sin behind you; you cannot go out as at other times. (*J. Durran.*) **He wist not that the Lord was departed from him.**—*Moral strength*:—I. THE SOURCE OF SAMSON'S STRENGTH. Evidently then there was a supernatural element in it. But, on the other hand, Samson's vow as a Nazarite bound him to a mode of life calculated to secure a healthy, vigorous physical development; and the rationalist will contend that that of itself is a sufficient explanation of the matter. There was both the natural and the supernatural. And is not Samson's strength in these respects typical of a higher strength, that which is moral and spiritual? Here also we may discern two elements, the Divine and human. The highest form of strength, the strength of goodness, by which a man triumphs over evil, and which finds its highest joy in holy and righteous action, is not to be gained by a life of dreamy contemplation, or by sitting still and affecting that God will some day transform us into giants. It is to be attained by self-denial, self-sacrifice, and true work. II. THE LOSS OF SAMSON'S STRENGTH. Now, what is the key to this sad affair? In one word, it is weakness; and that is the key to half the wickedness committed in the world. When temptation presents itself, instead of saying with a soul in utter revolt, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" men stop to think and dally, and once that is done there is fearful danger. They never intend doing any harm; they have good feelings and desires, and yet through moral weakness commit all kinds of wickedness, and involve themselves and others in misery. If we would be safe from breakdown, we must have a well-fortified moral character. Guard scrupulously the outworks; beware of everything that is morally enervating. If we fail to do this, ere we are aware we may find ourselves shorn of our strength. III. THE RESTORATION OF SAMSON'S STRENGTH. Have we not here the conditions of moral restoration, with its limitations? The first condition is a painful consciousness of weakness. Without this a man will never desire any change in his condition, and therefore he will never seek any. There must further be a realisation of the folly and wickedness of his conduct, producing sincere regret for it and earnest desires and resolution of amendment. Hence, in true penitence there is an element that will deter a man from committing the sin again. And then there must also be the prayer of faith. Samson prayed and looked for an immediate answer. But there is something lost never to be regained. Samson's strength was restored, but not his eyesight; and he lost his life into the bargain. And that typifies a solemn truth. The man who, like Samson or David, is guilty of glaring sin, may, by the mercy and grace of God, be restored; but he can never regain the feeling of comparative innocence he once enjoyed. To the backslider these thoughts should bring sadness indeed, but not despair. (*Joseph Ritson.*) *The man who has trifled once too often*:—The text speaks of one who has trifled once too often. He has allowed some influence, it scarcely matters what, to steal from him the secret of his strength. He has parted with it by his own folly—in a certain sense, with his eyes open—and yet he treats it as still recoverable by the exercise of quite a common kind of effort and of resolution. "I will go out," he says, "as at other times before, and shake myself." In vain. The strength is gone from him, and the Lord with it. Such is the parable; and to every thoughtful hearer it is its own interpreter. There is in many men, perhaps in most men, an erroneous idea, in two respects, of the free agency and the free will. We exaggerate to ourselves, in the first place, what is sometimes called the bondage of the will. It is an article of our religion, that we cannot of ourselves either will or do the thing that we ought. This, which is all true in its place—true as a reason for humility, and true as a motive for prayer—becomes a terrible falsehood on lips which utter it as an excuse for indolence, or as a sufficient explanation of any neglect or any sin by which we may be dishonouring God or giving an ill example to our generation. On the other hand, the same man who has pleaded the bondage of the will in excuse for his own negligences, follies, and sins will be the first to exaggerate his freedom in reference to the reparative powers of the future. "I have but to resolve, any day, and I shall shake myself free—free from the chain of habit, free from the binding force of past action, and from the connection of yesterday and to-morrow in the living man of to-day"—this is language quite familiar to us all, in the ear, if not in the heart. In this state of mind we exaggerate our freedom, as in the

other we unduly disparaged it. The real bondage of the will lies in the having sinned away the freedom. It would be easy to apply this general experience to the various departments of the life. "I will go out, as at other times before, and shake myself." Thus speaks the man who has allowed some influence of evil to fasten itself upon his conduct, and yet refuses to regard the fetter as anything more than a daily separate willing, which could any morning be reversed and willed into the opposite. The doctrine which that man wants is the true doctrine of the bondage. Tell him that to-morrow, if he does not take heed, he will be a slave; tell him that "whosoever committeth sin is sin's bondman"; tell him that, for anything he knows, by to-morrow the Lord may have departed; tell him that this one night's sinning may be to him like that fatal sleep upon the knees of the traitoress, which cost Samson eyesight and life—"I made haste and prolonged not the time" is his one chance; the dream of liberty is not false only, for him, but fatal; let him awake and cry mightily unto God, if so be He may yet this once hear him, that he perish not. We cannot doubt that the same delusion has place in the faith as well as in the life. There are thousands at this moment dallying with scepticism, who would be terrified if they thought that they could not at any moment go forth from it all and shake themselves free. A man may count himself free to believe or to disbelieve; he may even set himself above his own scruples, and say, "To-morrow, if it so pleases me, I will go out and shake myself free of them"; but, in reality, he is fastening them upon himself to-day by the very postponement, and to-morrow, if it ever dawn upon him, may find him one from whom God Himself has departed. There is in us all, as God has created us, a marvellous elasticity of mind, body, and estate. The recuperative power is perhaps the greatest of His gifts. We have seen it wonderfully exemplified on the bed of sickness. We have seen it wonderfully exemplified in the fortunes of men and nations. We have seen it wonderfully exemplified in the moral being. Some terrible flaw there was, in early days, in the character; some vice of untruthfulness, or some worse vice still, brought disgrace and punishment after it into the school-life and into the young home. But, by the blessing of God upon discipline tempered with love, a new growth of honesty and of purity showed itself in the life, and a noble career of usefulness and honour obliterated, long before death, the very memory of the sad beginning. We have seen it wonderfully exemplified in the one higher region, of the spiritual life. Once there was carelessness; once there was unbelief; once there was scoffing: but the blessed promise of the "last first" had place, by the grace of God, in the history as a whole; and one of the brightest ornaments of the faith and of the Church has been the product of a "trying in the fire" which promised only, to the eye of flesh, scorching and scathing, if not destruction. This is one side of human experience. But there is another. The recuperative power is wonderful, but it has its limit. "Thus far and no further" is written upon it, or it would bring evil and not blessing with it. There is a point beyond which recovery is not. If we could foresee the exact moment at which, or the precise act by which, the limit of the possible recovery would be overpassed, it would be contrary to God's uniform dealing; it would but tempt to presumption on the way to it. No man knows exactly how many injuries he may do himself, in health or wealth, in conduct or faith, and be scatheless. He must take his chance. If he will trifle in any of these ways, there is no Divine Mentor to say to him, The next time but two, or, the next time but twenty, will be fatal. The man is standing aloof from God all the time, and by the nature of the case must look to himself alone for monition. Whatever has been said, and said truly, of the restorative powers of this being, there is another sense, and a yet more grave one, in which we must read the words, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made." We speak now of the identity and the continuity of the life, which makes it utter childishness for a man to say suddenly to himself, "I will go out and shake myself, and I shall be another man." There is a mighty power in the will, there is a mightier power still in Divine grace; but the former cannot, and the latter could not consistently, isolate one period of the life altogether from another, or make that in the past, which was most of all to be regretted and mourned over, actually unmade or undone again, so as to be as though it had never been. All this is no reason for despondency. Although we are warned by the text that there is always a danger, for those who are living without God in the world, that they may, even without knowing it, overstep the limit of grace, and find God departed from them when they would shake themselves from their bonds, yet we must remember that all this is no matter of chance, caprice, or destiny; it is the result of a long process of sinning and

neglecting, which need not be any man's; it is a loud call to awake and arise while we may; to seek God now while He certainly may be found, and, instead of trusting in our independent powers of recovery and self-amendment, to cast ourselves earnestly upon the help of His grace who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not. (*Dean Vaughan.*) *Blessed and tragic unconsciousness* (with Exod. xxxiv. 29):—The recurrence of the same phrase in two such opposite connections is very striking. I. BEAUTY AND STRENGTH COME FROM COMMUNION WITH GOD. In both the cases with which we are dealing these were of a merely material sort. The light on Moses' face and the strength in Samson's arm were, at the highest, but types of something far higher and nobler than themselves. But still, the presence of the one and the departure of the other alike teach us the conditions on which we may possess both in nobler form, and the certainty of losing them if we lose hold of God. There have been in the past, and there are to-day, thousands of simple souls shut out by lowliness of position, and other circumstances from all the refining and ennobling influences which the world makes so much of, who yet in character and bearing, aye, and sometimes in the very look of their meek faces, are living witnesses how true and mighty is the power of loving gazing upon Jesus Christ to transform a nature. All of us who have had much to do with Christians of the humbler classes know that. There is no influence to refine and beautify men like that of living near Jesus Christ and walking in the light of that beauty which is the effulgence of the Divine glory and express image of His person. And in like manner as beauty, so strength comes from communion with God, and laying hold on Him. Samson's consecration, rude and external as that consecration was, both in itself and in its consequences, had passed away from him. II. THE BEARER OF THE RADIANCE IS UNCONSCIOUS OF IT. "Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone." In all regions of life, the consummate apex and crowning charm of excellence is unconsciousness of excellence. Whenever a man begins to suspect that he is good, he begins to be bad; and you rob every virtue and beauty of character of some portion of its attractive fairness when the man who bears it knows, or fancies that he knows it. The charm of childhood is its perfect unconsciousness, and the man has to win back the child's heritage, and become as a little child, if he would enter into and dwell in the kingdom of heaven. And so in the loftiest region of all, that of the religious life, depend on it, the more a man is like Christ the less he knows it, and the better he is the less he suspects it. III. THE STRONG MAN MADE WEAK IS UNCONSCIOUS OF HIS WEAKNESS. The very fact that you do not suppose the statement to have the least application to yourself is perhaps the very sign that it has. When the life blood is pouring out of a man he faints before he dies. The swoon of unconsciousness is the condition of some professing Christians. Frost-bitten limbs are quite comfortable, and only tingle when circulation is coming back. I remember a great elm-tree, the pride of an avenue in the South, that had spread its branches for more years than the oldest man could count, and stood, leafy and green. Not until a winter storm came one night and laid it low with a crash did anybody suspect what everybody saw in the morning—that the heart was eaten out of it, and nothing left but a shell of bark. Some Christian people are like that; they manage leaves, they manage fruit; when the storm comes they will go down, because the heart has been out of their religion for years. "Samson wist not that the Lord was departed from him." And so, because there are so many things that mask the ebbing away of a Christian life, and because our own self-love and habits come in to hide declension, let me earnestly exhort you and myself to watch ourselves very narrowly. Again let me say, let us ask God to help us. "Search me, O God, and try me." We shall never rightly understand what we are unless we spread ourselves out before Him, and crave that Divine Spirit, which is the candle of the Lord, to be carried even in our hands into the secret recesses of our sinful hearts. And, last of all, let us keep near to Jesus Christ, near enough to Him to feel His touch, to hear His voice, to see His face, and to carry down with us into the valley some radiance on our countenances which may tell even the world that we have been up where the Light lives and reigns. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The withdrawal of Divine influences*:—I. CHRISTIANS IN A STATE OF GRACE AND DIVINE FAVOUR MAY, IN A GREAT MEASURE, BE FORSAKEN OF GOD, AND YET BE INSENSIBLE THEREOF. 1. The prevalence of some darling idol in the heart may so blind the discerning faculty and disorder the understanding that the soul may not perceive its distance from the ways of religion. 2. There can be no doubt concerning this truth, that God withdraws sometimes from His people, if we observe the many

complaints they make to this purpose (Psa. xxx. 7). These complaints were not without cause, nor would such pious characters complain without reason. The deadened state of their souls made them feel that the Divine influences and power were withdrawn; they found the stream was in a great measure stopped, when the waters of life did not revive their souls. 3. Christians may not perceive the withdrawing of the Divine influence, because there may be a counterfeit resemblance between their idols and their duty. When we have a strong affection for something connected with another thing that is good, we seldom see the difference between them, but fall into error and mistake through inattention. We view under one character things different in their nature; and perceive not the unlawfulness of what we covet, when we find it, in some measure, related to other things that are innocent. 4. The subtlety and the deceitfulness of sin in the souls of the best Christians hinder them from distinguishing the knowledge of Christianity from its life and practice. 5. Believers may not only be insensible of God's withdrawing from them, but also embrace false for true grounds of comfort and enlargement. Sin is so deceitful that it will creep in upon the believer under a mask: sometimes a false hope, at other times a deceitful joy will deceive the saints themselves. II. EVIDENCES OF THIS CONDITION. 1. When men live easy and indifferent under the means of salvation; when they are not active in the performance of the duties belonging to their several stations and characters in life, but like Samson, instead of destroying the Philistines, for which he was raised up, fall asleep in carnal security, and begin to enter into league with the enemies of God; when they begin to remit their watchfulness, and live secure and careless. 2. When men not only have no fears of their present evil condition, but think well of it; when they imagine that they are rich, and increased in goods, and stand in need of nothing, &c. 3. When thoughts of death and a future judgment are removed from men's meditation and consideration; when the evil day is put far away, and people, like those of whom the prophet Ezekiel speaks, say, "The Lord hath forsaken the earth, neither doth He consider it." (*J. Williamson.*) *Samson conquered:*— I. THE STRENGTH OF THE CONSECRATED MAN. Even though he may consecrate himself to a wrong object, yet if it be a thorough consecration, he will have strength. In the old Roman wars with Pyrrhus, you remember an ancient story of self-devotion. There was an oracle which said that victory would attend that army whose leader should give himself up to death. Decius, the Roman Consul, knowing this, rushed into the thickest of the battle, that his army might overcome by his dying. The prodigies of valour which he performed are proofs of the power of consecration. The Romans at that time seemed to be every man a hero, because every man was a consecrated man. They went to battle with this thought—"I will conquer or die; the name of Rome is written on my heart; for my country I am prepared to live, or for that to shed my blood." And no enemies could ever stand against them. If a Roman fell, there were no wounds in his back, but all in his breast. His face, even in cold death, was like the face of a lion, and when looked upon it was of terrible aspect. They were men consecrated to their country. How much more is this true if I limit the description to that which is peculiar to the Christian—consecration to God! II. THE SECRET OF HIS STRENGTH. I have heard some men talk as if the strength of free-will, of human nature, was sufficient to carry men to heaven. No strength of nature can suffice to serve the Lord aright. No man can say that Jesus is the Christ but by the Holy Ghost. If, then, the first act of Christian life is beyond all human strength, how much more are those higher steps far beyond any one of us? III. WHAT IS THE PECULIAR DANGER OF A CONSECRATED MAN? His danger is that his locks may be shorn; that is to say, that his consecration may be broken. Now there are a thousand razors with which the devil can shave off the locks of a consecrated man without his knowing it. Sometimes he takes the sharp razor of pride, and when the Christian falls asleep, and is not vigilant, he comes with it and begins to run his fingers upon the Christian's locks, and says, "What a fine fellow you are! What wonders you have done! Didn't you rend that lion finely? Wasn't it a great feat to smite those Philistines hip and thigh? Ah! you will be talked of as long as time endures for carrying those gates of Gaza away! You need not be afraid of anybody." And so on goes the razor, lock after lock falling off, and Samson knows it not. He is just thinking within himself, "How brave am I! How great am I!" Thus works the razor of pride—cut, cut, cut away—and he wakes up to find himself bald, and all his strength gone. Another razor he uses is self-sufficiency. The moment we begin to think that it is our own arm that has gotten us the victory, it will be all over

with us—our locks of strength shall be taken away, and the glory shall depart from us. There is yet another and a more palpable danger still. When a consecrated man begins to change his purpose in life and live for himself—that razor shaves clean indeed. Oh, Christian, above all things take care of thy consecration. Ever feel that thou art wholly given up to God, and to God alone. IV. THE CHRISTIAN'S DISGRACE. His locks are cut off. I have seen him in the ministry. He spake like an angel of God; many there were that regarded him; he seemed to be sound in doctrine and earnest in manner. I have seen him turn aside; it was but a little thing—some slight deviation from the ancient orthodoxy of his fathers, some slight violation of the law of his Church. I have seen him, till he has given up doctrine after doctrine, until at last the very place wherein he preached has become a bye-word and a proverb. What disgrace was there! What a fall! The man who came out in the camps of Dan, and seemed to be moved by the Spirit of the Lord, has become the slave of error. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Strength lost*:—I. A MAN MAY LOSE HIS STRENGTH, AND YET LIVE IN THE EXPERIENCES OF THE PAST. You may have made a profession of faith in Christ; you were "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might"; but you have departed from the Lord, and yet you still retain the forms and habits of your spiritual life. You have a name to live—that is all. You do not know that the Lord has departed from you. II. WHEN A MAN DEPARTS FROM THE LORD, IT IS CERTAIN THE LORD WILL DEPART FROM HIM. The departure is at first scarcely perceptible—it is in thought and feeling and then in life. I have seen glaciers, like rivers that, flowing down the sides of the Alps, have been stopped and arrested in a moment. There seems no movement, for all appears to be the same year after year. Though not perceptible to the eye, it can be proved by experiment that the frozen river is always moving on and on. So with you—the distance from God may be increasing and widening, but it is so slowly that no one perceives it. At length some circumstance leads to the manifestation of your real state, and the fearful consciousness of your departure from God. The Lord does not all at once depart—there are restraints, remonstrances, difficulties put in the way of backsliding; there are invitations to return. At last, when all is vain, and the man will have his own way, a Divine voice says, "Let him alone." III. WHEN GOD DEPARTS FROM A MAN, THE CONSEQUENCE WILL BE, THAT THE MAN LOSES HIS STRENGTH. Have you ever seen an eagle in its captivity, wearing its chains, an uncrowned king? How sad the spectacle, how deep the humiliation—what a seeming consciousness of fallen greatness! The eagle was made for the glorious mountains, its home is on the summit of the lofty rocks, its wings are fitted for flight, its eye to look on the sun. How much sadder is it to see the change that has come over this man. How are the mighty fallen! (*H. J. Bevis.*) *The weakness of strength*:—We still need to learn what true strength is, and that both physical and intellectual power may be the means of moral weakness. I. STRENGTH FROM ANCESTRY. Victor Hugo remarks: "If you want to reform a man, you must begin with his grandmother." The parents of Samson were sober and pious people. The weakening effects of strong drinks upon posterity are well known. One thing that makes it hard to be born again is being born wrong the first time. II. STRENGTH THROUGH CONSECRATION. III. STRENGTH MAY BECOME WEAKNESS. Great powers imply great passions. With every increase of faculty come more subtle temptations. There is nothing so destructive to strength and youth as sensual sin. IV. STRENGTH FORFEITED THROUGH FALSEHOOD. He broke his vow, and with it broke faith with God. No one can really betray the strong man but himself. Break trust with God, and sin will be too strong for you, and the Philistines of the soul will enslave you. V. LAST EFFORT OF STRENGTH. The mercy of God gave him still a chance. He was not wholly lost. So do you, already weakened by falsehood to God and your best self, use the strength that remains. Make one last effort to break the chains that bind you. A little more, and your strength will be entirely gone. (*G. Elliott.*) *Loss of strength*:—I. THE STRENGTH BY WHICH ALONE WE CAN OVERCOME EVIL IS TO BE OBTAINED FROM THE SPIRIT OF GOD. II. THIS SPIRITUAL STRENGTH IS LOST BY US WHEN WE YIELD OURSELVES TO SIN. III. ONE MAY LOSE THIS SPIRITUAL STRENGTH WITHOUT AT THE MOMENT BEING CONSCIOUS OF THE PRIVATION. Samson "wist not that the Lord was departed from him." That was melancholy enough, but its spiritual antitype is infinitely more so, for it is terribly true that one may become morally feeble through habitual indulgence in sin, and yet at the time be unaware of the change that has passed upon him. How shall we account for this? 1. We may explain it by the fact that all outward things may be with him as they were before. He may be

outwardly attentive to the ordinances of religion, but his heart has been given to some earthly object. 2. Another explanation of the unconsciousness of many to the terrible loss of which we speak may be the stealthiness of the growth of the sin which has caused it. No man becomes helplessly wicked all at once. 3. Another reason why a man may be unconscious of the loss of his spiritual strength is the blinding effect of sin upon the conscience. When the snow is untrodden you may easily distinguish the first footprints that are made upon it, but after multitudes have hardened it by their tread, it is no longer possible to mark each separate traveller's tracks. So conscience may take faithful note of the first sins which one commits, but when habits have, as I may say, formed footmarks over it, the soft impressiveness of its early stage has gone, and it becomes impenetrable as a rock. IV. THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THIS LOSS OF STRENGTH WILL BE REALISED WHEN THE STRENGTH ITSELF IS MOST NEEDED. You know the dreadful agony of nightmare, when in your dream, being pursued by some assassin, your limbs refuse to perform their office, and you seem to be left in the assailant's power. Such is the experience of the man who discovers in some time of urgency that his strength has departed from him. Enumerate a few of the times of crisis, which will infallibly test whether we have God with us or not: temptation, affliction, death, judgment. As all these are experiences through which every one of us must pass, we ought to be sure that we have strength enough to sustain us in them all. If we have not strength enough for these occasions, we have virtually no strength at all. It is for such times we must prepare, and not for the mere review days of showy profession. Men do not build a ship to lie all decked with bunting in the harbour, but to weather the rough storms of mid-ocean, and the cable that will not bear the toughest strain is in time of hurricane as bad as none at all. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Man's power for God's work*:—I. THAT IT IS DERIVED FROM A SPECIAL CONNECTION WITH GOD. All power comes from God: this is true not only of physical, but also of intellectual and moral power. 1. God is in a good man, morally—dwells in him as the favourite author dwells in the mind of the devoted reader. God's thoughts live in his intellect, God's love glows in his heart: he is filled with all the fulness of God. 2. That God is with a good man operationally. Without Him we can do nothing in His cause. II. THAT SIN DISSOLVES THIS SPECIAL CONNECTION BETWEEN MAN AND GOD. 1. By destroying our sympathy with God. 2. By awakening a dread of God. 3. By generating an opposition to God. III. THAT THIS DISSOLUTION MAY OCCUR WHEN THE SUBJECT IS UNCONSCIOUS OF IT. 1. Because of the gradual way in which it takes place. God does not give a man up at once. 2. Because external circumstances continue the same. Providence pursues its wonted course; health continues, business prospers, the sun shines as usual, and temporal blessings fall free and full as ever on the path. 3. Because the mechanical habits of religion are maintained. There may be family worship, regular attendance on the house of God, but no soul in anything. IV. THAT A PERIOD WILL ARRIVE WHEN THE DISSOLUTION WILL BE PAINFULLY REALISED. In the hour of severe temptation—in the hour of suffering—in the dark hour of death—in the solemn hour of judgment the want of Divine moral strength will be deeply felt. Its lack will be ruin. (*Homilist*). *Samson, the Jewish Hercules*:—I. THAT GOD HAS RESPECT TO THE EMERGENCIES OF HIS PEOPLE. The raising of one man, rather than a host, to break the power of the Philistines, served to manifest the Divine power. II. THAT MORAL FEEBLENESS MAY CO-EXIST WITH THE HIGHEST PHYSICAL ENERGY. Many giants in body are dwarfs in soul. Many who have slain an army have been slain by their own lusts. III. SAMSON'S HISTORY SHOWS THAT GREAT PHYSICAL STRENGTH IS NOT THE HIGHEST GOOD OF MAN. Here God furnishes the world with a striking example that great muscular energy, apart from moral goodness, is of little worth. Look at the misery to which he was reduced—blinded, deluded, destroyed. IV. SAMSON'S HISTORY SHOWS THAT ONE MAN, THROUGH GOD, CAN ACCOMPLISH GREAT THINGS. (*Ibid.*) *The fall and rise of a great man*:—I. THE FALL OF A GREAT MAN. 1. The whence and the whither of the fall. (1) From special connection with God. (2) Into the hands of his enemies. (*a*) "They put out his eyes." When a man falls from God, he sinks into darkness; he is like a planet cut off from its centre, rolling in a starless, moonless midnight. Hell is "outer darkness." (*b*) "They bound him in fetters of brass." Emblem of the fettering power of sin. Evil prejudices and habits—how they manacle the limbs of the soul! (*c*) "He did grind in the prison house." The little liberty of limb he had was only allowed that he might feel his bondage more. Servants of sin are slaves of the devil. The corn the sinner grinds is not for himself. 2. The wherefore and

the how of this man's fall. (1) The cause was in himself. He did it, and did it freely. The devil himself cannot push a man down against his will. (2) His fall was very gradual, and even imperceptible to himself. He had been pampering his appetite, and gratifying his animal desires; and thus gradually sliding away from the virtuous and the true, he lost his power before he was aware of it. Remember that the losing of Divine power is a gradual and an imperceptible process. No outward event will announce its loss; no great convulsion within will signify it. He will only know it when the time comes that he requires it; when, like Samson, he is reduced to an emergency, requires Divine power, makes an effort, and finds it is gone. II. THE RISE OF A GREAT MAN. 1. The demonstrations of his recovered strength. (1) Miraculous achievement. (2) Self-sacrificing heroism. 2. The means of his recovered power. (1) Practical obedience. He who does the will, gets the power of God. (2) Earnest prayer. Lessons: 1. A solemn warning to men of signal ability. There are many intellectual giants every day being stripped of their power, and lying eyeless and crippled in the dungeon. 2. A special encouragement to great men who have fallen. (*Ibid.*) *Lost grace unrealised*:—He knew not that the Lord was departed from him. No wonder; he felt not the smarting effect of it as yet: he fared as he who is robbed in the night of all his treasure or wares of his storehouse; but till the light of the day he misseth nothing. But then, oh what an inventory makes he of his several losses! And so did this poor self-robber in this place. When the Philistines came upon him there was no power to resist; then it appeared indeed that he was robbed to purpose. It is woeful to lose grace, but more to feel no such loss. (*R. Rogers.*) **He did grind in the prison house.**—*Ignominious tasks*:—Look at the ignoble task to which Samson is put by the Philistines, a type of the ignominious uses to which the hero may be doomed by the crowd. The multitude cannot be trusted with a great man. In the prison at Gaza the fallen chief was set to grind corn, to do the work of slaves. To him, indeed, work was a blessing. From the bitter thoughts that would have eaten out his heart he was somewhat delivered by the irksome labour. In reality, as we now perceive, no work degrades; but a man of Samson's type and period thought differently. The Philistine purpose was to degrade him; and the Hebrew captive would feel in the depths of his hot brooding nature the humiliating doom. Look, then, at the parallels. Think of a great statesman placed at the head of a nation to guide its policy in the line of righteousness, to bring its laws into harmony with the principles of human freedom and Divine justice—think of such an one, while labouring at his sacred task with all the ardour of a noble heart, called to account by those whose only desire is for better trade, the means of beating their rivals in some market or bolstering up their failing speculations. Or see him at another time pursued by the cry of a class that feels its prescriptive rights invaded or its position threatened. Take again a poet, an artist, a writer, a preacher intent on great themes, eagerly following after the ideal to which he has devoted himself, but exposed every moment to the criticism of men who have no soul—held up to ridicule and reprobation because he does not accept vulgar models and repeat the catchwords of this or that party. Philistinism is always in this way asserting its claim, and ever and anon it succeeds in dragging some ardent soul into the dungeon to grind thenceforth at the mill. With the very highest, too, it is not afraid to intermeddle. Christ Himself is not safe. The Philistines of to-day are doing their utmost to make His name inglorious. For what else is the modern cry that Christianity should be chiefly about the business of making life comfortable in this world and providing not only bread but amusement for the crowd? The ideas of the Church are not practical enough for this generation. To get rid of sin—that is a dream; to make men fearers of God, soldiers of truth, doers of righteousness at all hazards—that is in the air. Let it be given up; let us seek what we can reach; bind the name of Christ and the Spirit of Christ in chains to the work of a practical secularism and let us turn churches into pleasant lounging-places and picture galleries. Why should the soul have the benefit of so great a name as that of the Son of God? Is not the body more? Is not the main business to have houses and railways, news and enjoyment? The policy of undeifying Christ is having too much success. If it makes way there will soon be need for a fresh departure into the wilderness. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*) *A grist from the prison mill of Gaza*:—I. In Samson's history we see THE WONDERFUL FORBEARANCE OF GOD, NOTWITHSTANDING HIS MISUSE OF GREAT MERCIES AND OF SUPERNATURAL STRENGTH. II. SAMSON LOST HIS GREAT STRENGTH IN AN UNCONSCIOUS MANNER. His frame was not convulsed when the barber removed his locks. No sobs revealed the fact that

he had become as another man. He slept on just as other men sleep. III. Samson's history is PICTORIAL OF THE PROGRESSIVE DOWNWARD TENDENCIES OF SINNING. Glorious were the hopes of his infancy. IV. Once more, the downward course of the Hebrew judge ILLUSTRATES OUR RELUCTANCE TO GIVE UP THE LAST BADGE OF OUR NAZARITE CONSECRATION. We find him disgustingly in dalliance with sin, and yet keeping, as it were, to the very last moment the outward sign of his covenant relation to God. His vows were for life. But in those cases where the Nazarite covenant was for a limited period of life, the expiration of that period was signalised by shaving the head. When Samson, therefore, told his religious secret, he took the formal step to separate himself wholly from his God. The substance of his covenant he had long since lost, but the seal of it he now throws to the devil. I do not wonder, children of pious parents, that you are uneasy if living in sin under such vows as rest upon you. Nor do I wonder that you are reluctant to part with the last locks that bind you to the God of your fathers. (*W. A. Scott, D.D.*) **The hair of his head began to grow.**—*Strength lost and restored*:—I. THE RIGHT RELATION OF MAN TO GOD IS THE CONDITION OF HIS REAL STRENGTH. There were many remarkable circumstances connected with the birth of Samson; and the angel who appeared to his mother gave her most minute directions about the training of the child, that thus he might be fitted for the great work to which he was designated. Where there is a right relation to God there is personal dedication, and as the result there will be separateness and sanctity. The consecrated man was to be temperate and chaste, to avoid everything that would defile him. You are not to suffer the flesh to overshadow the spirit. You are to "abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul"; to mortify your members which are upon the earth; and to keep your body under and bring it into subjection. The Divine presence will be recognised by the man who stands in a right relation to God—the true strength of the man is in God. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson—moving him at times, rousing him to activity—stirring up his whole nature to great and heroic deeds, and giving him strength to do them. You realise the Divine presence. You can say, "I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved." God is with you in all events and circumstances—in all conflicts and victories—in life and in death. II. THIS RELATION TO GOD MAY BE WEAKENED AND BROKEN, AND THEN THE STRENGTH OF THE MAN DEPARTS. 1. This may be the result of an unhallowed alliance. This was the first wrong step on the part of Samson. Marriage is the oldest human institute, and the one that has been most perverted and abused. In many instances the two never become one—and never can become one—but must remain in awful separateness and loneliness. Their souls never touch each other at any point. In many instances there are no true affinities—no real, abiding love. Marriage is sometimes created by mere excitement or passion—it is based on prudential or mercenary motives. Where there are no mental or moral fitnesses, these ill-assorted matches become the pregnant source of the miseries and wretchedness that abound in the world. 2. This relation may be broken through the indulgence of unrestrained passions. The strong man is a child when governed by his passions; he has no self-mastery or control—his affections are misplaced; they have degenerated into passions. His weakness is known—not the secret of his strength—but men take advantage of his weakness to find out where his strength lies, that they may thus deprive him of it. Our weaknesses lead to the loss of strength. 3. A man may lose his strength and yet live in the experiences of the past. The man's strength was gone, but "he wist not that the Lord had departed from him." 4. When a man departs from the Lord, it is certain the Lord will depart from him. 5. When God departs from a man, the consequence will be that the man loses his strength. He cannot retain his strength and lose God. When he falls into the hands of his enemies, then comes the fearful consciousness of his loss. What a contrast between strength and weakness—light and darkness—liberty and captivity! III. THIS RELATION MAY BE RENEWED, AND THE STRENGTH RESTORED. "Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow after he was shaven." The man turns to God. This is true repentance. In the parable, the son when he has spent all—when he has nothing left—when a mighty famine comes, and he begins to be in want—when his servitude is the most degrading—comes to himself, and says, "I will arise," &c. So the captivity and wretchedness of this man may have awakened reflection, and led to repentance. IV. STRENGTH MAY BE RESTORED, BUT THERE ARE SOME THINGS THAT ARE LOST FOR EVER. There is the return of strength, but not of sight. Sin does fearful injury. You may return after your backslidings—

God may forgive you. There are some things you have lost—freshness, purity, peace, wholeness, light, joy. You know you are pardoned, but the light is gone. You walk softly. There are the traces and scars of the past. The lightning has scathed you—has blinded you. Never think lightly of sin; it is an evil and a bitter thing—darkness follows it. (*H. J. Bevis.*) *Shaven and shorn, but not beyond hope:*—I. WHAT THIS GROWING OF THE HAIR PICTURES. I think that this pictures the gradual restoration of certain among us who have backslidden from God. II. WHAT IT SPECIFICALLY SYMBOLISES. Samson's strength lay in his consecration. His hair was the token of his dedication to God. I know Christian people who used to spend an hour a day in prayer. The hour has dwindled into five minutes. They used to be constant at week-night services. They very seldom gladden us with their presence now; and they are not as happy as they once were. I can read this riddle. If a man were to reduce his meals to eating once a week, we could not warrant his health. So I do not think that people who neglect the means of grace, and give up their consecration, can expect to be lively, happy, or vigorous. III. WHAT IT PROPHESIED when Samson's hair began to grow again. I wonder why these Philistines did not care to keep his hair from growing to any length. But wicked men are not in all matters wise men; indeed, they so conspicuously fail in one point or another that Scripture calls them fools. The devil himself is a fool after all. He thinks that he is wonderfully cunning, but there is always a place where he breaks down. Satan is very cunning in getting hold of backsliders, but he generally manages to let them slip by his over-confidence in their wilfulness. When Samson's hair began to grow, what did it prophesy? 1. Well, it prophesied hope for Samson. Now, if any of you have signs of restoring grace in your hearts, and you are coming back to your God and Saviour, be glad, be thankful. Do not hesitate to let your renewed devotion to God be seen by those round about you. If the grace of God is moving you at all, be hopeful and quicken your steps, and come to Jesus. 2. Joy for Samson, but also hope for Israel. Oh, if any of the Israelites did get in to see him in prison, how they must have been cheered by the sight of his returning hair! Oh, you do not know the joy that you backsliders will give to the hearts of God's people if you do but return! There is joy not only with the Great Shepherd, but with His friends and His neighbours when the lost sheep is restored to the fold. 3. Well, it prophesied mischief for the Philistines. They did not know it, but if they could have read the writing in Samson's heart, they would have understood that he meant to shave their nation quite as closely as they had shaven him. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) **Call for Samson, that he may make us sport.**—*The influence of amusements on character and destiny:*—The best men that the world ever knew have had their sports. William Wilberforce trundled hoop with his children. Martin Luther helped dress the Christmas-tree. Show me a man who never lights up with sportfulness and has no sympathy with the recreations of others, and I will show you a man who is a stumbling-block to the kingdom of God. Such men are caricatures of religion. I have no confidence in a man who makes a religion of his gloomy looks. God means you to be happy. But, when there are so many sources of innocent pleasure, why tamper with anything that is dangerous and polluting? 1. You may judge of any amusement by its healthful result or by its baleful reaction. If an amusement sends you home at night nervous so you cannot sleep, you have been where you ought not to have been. There are amusements that send a man next day to his work bloodshot, yawning, stupid, nauseated, and they are wrong kinds of amusements. There are entertainments that give a man disgust with the drudgery of life. Our recreations are intended to build us up, and if they pull us down as to our moral or as to our physical strength, you may come to the conclusion that they are obnoxious. 2. Those amusements are wrong which lead into expenditure beyond your means. 3. You may judge of amusements by their effect upon physical health. 4. Again, judge of the places of amusement by the companionship into which they put you. 5. Again, any amusement that gives you a distaste for domestic life is bad. How many bright domestic circles have been broken up by sinful amusements! (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) **Only this once.**—*How not to pray:*—We have heard these words until we are heartsick of them. It seems as if such words could not be done without in the history of human experience. Samson would gather himself up for a grand final effort; he said in effect, "O Lord, the Philistines have taken away mine eyes, I am no longer what I was, I am no longer a prophet and servant of Thine, I am a poor fool; I gave up my secret; Lord, this once, only this once; I pray

Thee let the old strength come back, and I will be avenged for my two eyes." It was very natural, it was most human, it was just what we would have done under similar circumstances, and therefore do not let us laugh at the dismantled giant. Let us accommodate the passage, so that it may become a lamp which we can hold over various points of life. "'Only this once': forgive me, I will never ask it again, this is the very last time; I have no excuse, I did the evil deed, I spoke the false word, but I am getting old, and I shall not trouble my family much longer; give me the final pardon; I seem as if I could not do without it; it seems as if I had it I would die easily and triumphantly; I do not deserve it, but add one more to your forbearances; I will never ask again, but pardon me this one time." You know that speech; it is now a stale speech in your ears; you have pardoned seventy times seven, and another pardon is requested with the promise that it shall be the last. This is the very thing we have done in the case of the Divine Creator and Redeemer of the worlds; we have told Him that we would never repeat the sin. It is not of our necessity we go again, but for the very selfsame sin we did last week, and we will do to-morrow. Life is critical. I am sure I thought I would never do it again; I said this shall not occur again; then I told a blacker lie than ever, and put myself more thoroughly into the devil's service. And then we have it again in the daily cry from familiar voices: "Deliver me out of this perplexity only this once; no more; I will never ask for deliverance again, I will take the literal consequences; nay, I will pray to go to hell rather than come back to be delivered." And the fool means it; he thinks he will be brave next time. You know this in your own family, in your own soul, in your own son, daughter, fastest friend. "Only this once, this other ten pounds; this once screen me, and I will never, never return." You know the cry. Which of us has not in his desk a hundred promises that this shall be the last solicitation of love? We say again and again, "Lord, let Thy providence help me in this case, only this once; this is really the final perplexity of my life; I am very ill, and I am afraid of the other world; I have suffered much on account of it in a dream but yesternight; I heard the groanings of the lost, I heard the cry for water, and the water had fled away. I do not want to die just now; if Thou wilt give the doctor great success and turn the herbal medicines of the field into sacramental wine, I will never grieve Thee more; only this once! and I promised God many things; I said I would love His Church, I would support His altar, I would vindicate the Cross; I would take up a new line and become a new man." He did, and the devil has never had a sturdier soldier. Oh, the pity of it! the utter, utter sadness of it! Now let us note three things about this prayer. 1. First of all, the prayer was to the true God. It was not offered to an idol. Know, then, that we may be praying to the right God; that is no guarantee that we shall get the answer which we desire. You may read the right book and get nothing out of it. Not every man who reads the Bible receives a revelation, or has the slightest idea that there is a revelation of a spiritual and effective kind in the whole range of Holy Scripture. The right God does not make the right prayer; the prayer is in the spirit, in the will; it is in the temper or disposition of the heart; it is in the self-crucifixion of the soul: not a cry, but a sacrifice. 2. What ailed this poor prayer? what was its mortal disease? The mortal disease of this prayer uttered by Samson was that it was offered in the wrong spirit. It is the spirit that determines the quality. "That I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes." It was a prayer for vengeance. That prayer comes easily to the natural spirit. We love to magnify the individual, and to think that individualism is personality. What grave mistakes we make in our verbal definitions! A man will say that he stands up for personality, when he knows nothing about it. He is standing up for individuality, his own little miserable self. Here is a man who comes forward to avenge his personal or individual or physical loss; in that spirit a man cannot pray. What he says may have the form of prayer, so to say the likeness of prayer, and yet the man may not be praying; he may be in reality simply and deeply cursing. A curse is not a prayer; an imprecation is not part of the great liturgy in which all redeemed souls ought to take part. Prayer is self-renunciation; prayer says, "Lord, Thy will be done, not mine." Thus the Divine will is done by consent, human and Divine, and is the law, in its own degree, of the universe; the soul then falls into the rhythmic movement of the creation, and the man is translated out of individuality into personality in its broadest definitions, and he is part and parcel of the great unity which swings like a censer round the altar Divine. 3. In the third place this

prayer was answered, but answered in judgment. Samson had his way, but his way killed him. God has many ways of answering prayer. One sad case is recorded which will at once occur to your memory: "He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul." They had their way, and lost it; they got what they wanted, and it poisoned them. How marvellous it is in all this process that Samson still had within him what I may call a spark of vital faith. He knew he had lost his opportunities, and forfeited his privileges, and betrayed his trust; yet he knew something higher than all this, namely, that God lives, and that God is a God of judgment, and that the way of God shall yet prevail upon the earth, be human circumstances and conditions what they may. He made the most of that vital spark. But Samson might have said, "Do not upbraid me; I have played the fool before God; I yielded up my secret, I parted with my strength, I ceased at once to be a judge in Israel and to be a child of God; but there is one last lingering flash of faith, and I want to turn that last lingering flash into works, into actions, into palpable and crushing results." Samson was then at the very height of his will; he then touched the sublimest personality of his own consciousness, and he was dealing not only with his enemies, but with the enemies of the Lord. This we may say; for the eternal comfort of the race it is written according to the blessing pronounced by father Jacob, "Gad, a troop shall overcome him: but he shall overcome at the last." So we come upon the familiar thought of intermediate and final victories. Gad, my poor, poor son, a troop shall overcome him, but he, my son Gad, shall overcome at the last. When they think he is dead he will spring to his feet; when they report it in pagan, uncircumcised cities that Gad is dead, Gad will rise and whet his sword and challenge the enemy to a deadlier combat. Do not pronounce upon intermediate failures; there may be many of them, and yet there may be conquest at the last. So it shall be with our poor hearts. Yes, we were caught in all the sins, the devil was triumphing over us, but we overcame at the last. "All these sins are ours, and we repent them," who can tell whether God will be gracious unto us, and give us a nail in His tabernacle, and one small place in His great providential plan? As a nation we have sinned; I do not see that our cup of iniquity could hold one drop more; it is not for us to fall back upon a history we have dishonoured, it is for us to go forward to a throne that is still a throne of mercy. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) Let me die with the Philistines.—*The death of Samson*:—I. HUMILIATION AND WEAKNESS ARE SURE TO FOLLOW THE FAILURE TO KEEP COVENANT WITH GOD. He lacks the highest motive and the holiest hope who has not consciously agreed to fulfil the conditions on which the exceeding great and precious promises of God are given. II. THE DISCIPLINE OF HUMILIATION IS THE ONLY WAY TO A RESTORATION OF STRENGTH. All great endowments bring with them also especial weaknesses. This big burly body carried great passions with it. This giant strength led easily to over-confidence. But a sudden gleam of light seems to show him the opportunity to complete his mission as the champion of Israel. Blind and alone, he may yet gain a victory for God and for His people over their oppressors. Now he confesses that his strength is in Jehovah. To Him he cries for help. His hair has grown again, but he does not put his trust in that. Perhaps he feels the vigour of his returning power, but in his blindness he needs God, however strong he may be. And as soon as he can pray again he is the hero again. III. WHILE ONE WHO HAS BROKEN COVENANT WITH GOD CAN NEVER COME BACK AND BE WHAT HE WAS BEFORE, GOD MAY SOMETIMES ACCOMPLISH MORE THROUGH A FALLEN MAN RESTORED THAN IF HE HAD NOT FALLEN. Poor Samson never could get back his eyes. No penitence or prayer could restore the lost faculty. Even though his strength came back, his eyesight did not. He must beg the aid of a boy to find his way. It is thus with all who fall from God and fail from duty, who turn their back upon the Lord and neglect the conditions of His blessing. The scars remain though the man is healed. One who has fallen into gross sin may be restored, but he is weakened. Do not let us think too lightly of the peril of sin, and especially of the sin of one who is pledged to God. The disability which comes from the violation of a conscious obligation is more severe and more lasting than any other. (*G. M. Boynton.*) *Lessons from the life of Samson*:—His character is unlike that of the other heroes of Hebrew story. Alone in the Old Testament he overflows with joyfulness. His very name is probably associated with the sunshine —"sunlike." He is light of heart, and his courage rises in the hour of danger. He has a sportive wit which sparkles in rhythmic couplets, flashes in epigrams, plays upon words. It will not be forgotten that the great child of daring and genius is

brought up a Neziyr-Elohim with his vow of abstinence. Unquestionably, he derived an inward strength of a certain kind from the conviction that he was indeed God's own, consecrated to Him from his mother's womb. Certainly, also, the circumstances which called him to be a judge must have had a strengthening and ennobling influence. We must remember that in Israel God's Spirit takes the place which in human history is ascribed to natural genius. But this influence of the Spirit was a gift and not necessarily a sanctifying grace. Now, such measure of spiritual strength as may have been given to Samson by his being a Neziyr-Elohim was, so to speak, artificial. No chain is stronger than its weakest link; no vow is stronger than the will behind it. Add to this, that the vow only covers an isolated fragment of the world of moral duty. Unnatural strictness in one direction sometimes compensates itself by unnatural laxity in another. Samson was a rigid total abstainer. I mean no unworthy sneer at a cause to which I wish well. But if Samson was a rigid total abstainer, so I believe is the Mormon, and so I know is the Moslem. At all events, Samson's strictness in one direction was compensated for by laxity in another. A fiercer passion than that for wine coursed through the hero's veins, and set his blood on fire. The unrivalled bodily strength co-exists with abject moral weakness. Why will so many novelists and poets speak as if strength and passion were almost convertible terms? What we call the strength of passion is really its weakness. It is not passion, but the repression of passion, which is really strong. And the strongest character is that in which what are called the strongest passions are held in leash by the sternest will. Lessons: 1. Flee from every sin that has light in its eye, and honey upon its tongue. Flee from the touch that wins, but blisters as it touches, and fills the vein with fire. 2. A second lesson derived from the fallen Nazarite is the weakness of our will; the helplessness of our resolutions; their imperfect and partial action upon our moral nature. How, then, is the will to be emancipated and strengthened? I am not now speaking of prudential rules, and humble efforts, indispensable though they are—I am not just yet speaking of a sacramental means of grace—but of ultimate Divine principles. (1) The strengthening of our will comes from the sympathy of Christ. In this we have a law of our human nature perfected. When our will needs an accession of strength, we find such accession by bringing it to a higher will. And the higher and purer that other will may be, with the stronger grasp shall it lay hold upon our sinking resolutions. (2) The strengthening of our will further comes from the inward gift of the Spirit. The great gift of the new covenant is (Jer. xxxi. 33). In those whose will Christ emancipates there is a supernatural power, conforming the man to the law, not dispensing him from it. 3. And now we are led to see from all this the fitness and reasonableness of the view entertained by the Church of the reality of grace in sacraments and ordinances. (*Abp. Wm. Alexander.*)

CHAPTER XVII.

VERS. 1–13. **Micah.**—*Micah's mother:*—In the second verse of this chapter Micah makes a clean confession of a great wrong which he had done to his mother. "It seems," says Matthew Henry, "that this old woman, with long scraping and saving, had hoarded a considerable sum of money—eleven hundred pieces of silver. It is likely she intended, when she died, to leave it to this son. In the meantime, it did her good to count it over and call it her own." On discovering that she had been relieved of her treasure, Micah's mother became justly indignant. She scolded and called down curses on the one who had robbed her. This she did in her son's presence, and though she made no direct charge of the offence upon him, her conduct greatly disturbed his conscience. Some time later he made an open acknowledgment to his mother of the whole matter, and restored the stolen treasure. The reappearance of the lost shekels had a remarkably soothing effect on her disposition. She forgot all about the wrong done to her, and all about her own distemper. "Blessed be thou of the Lord, my son," said this forgiving mother. Is it not wonderful what a difference a little money makes in one's disposition and feelings? She who could curse at its loss now as readily blesses with its return. One can imagine a very

different state of things had Micah come to her with his confession, but without the eleven hundred pieces of silver. Note now another incident in this transaction. After this money had been stolen Micah's mother gave as one reason for feeling so badly that "she had dedicated it wholly to the Lord." When she had it in her possession she had not the heart to do this, but as soon as it was gone she made known her good intentions. For some reason Micah was moved to restore to his mother the money which belonged to her. What did she do with it? Did she give it to the Lord, according to her reported oath of dedication? The record shows she gave to Him but the veriest part of it. Nine hundred shekels she kept for herself. The remaining two hundred she devoted to religious uses. What a picture in this conduct of Micah and his mother of poor, weak, vacillating, human nature, sinning and confessing, cursing and blessing, as circumstances determine! "What wonder," says Matthew Henry, "that such a mother had such a son! She paved the way for his theft, by her probable stinginess." In her poverty she professed generous feeling towards the Lord's cause. When her money came back, she gave to it less than one-fifth of the all she had promised. (*W. H. Allbright.*) **There was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.**—*Anarchy:*—At the first, one would think that it were a merry world if every man might do what he listed. But yet sure those days were evil. This, a complaint. To let you see, then, what a monster lurketh under these smooth terms, "doing that which is right in our eyes." Two parts there be, the eye, and the hand. To begin with the eye, and that which is right in the eye. There began all evil in the first temptation—even from this persuasion, they should need no direction from God, or from any; their own eye should be their director to what was right. Three evils are in it. It is not safe to commit the judgment of what is right to the eye; and yet it is our surest sense, as that which apprehendeth greatest variety of differences. But I know withal, the optics (the masters of that faculty) reckon up twenty several ways, all which it may be and is deceived. The object full of deceit; things are not as they seem. The medium is not evenly disposed. Take but one: that of the oar in the water. Though the oar be straight, yet, if the eye be judge, it seemeth bowed. And if that which is right may seem crooked, that which is crooked may seem right. So the eye is no competent judge. But admit we will make the eye judge, yet not every man's eye; that were too much. Many weak and dim eyes there be, many goggle and mis-set; many little better than blind; shall all and every of these be allowed to define what is right? Some, it may be (perhaps the eagle), but shall the owl and all? I trow not. Many misshapen kinds of right shall we have if that may be suffered. We all know self-love, what a thing it is, how it dazzleth the sight; how everything appeareth right and good that appeareth through those spectacles. Therefore, not right by the eye. At least, not every man's eye. Nay, not any man is right by his own eye. I now pass to the next point. Here is a hand, too. For here at this breaketh in the whole sea of confusion, when the hand followeth the eye, and men proceed to do as lewdly as they see perversely. And sure the hand will follow the eye, and men do as seemeth right to them, be it never so absurd. 1. Micah liked an idol well; Micah had a good purse; he told out two hundred shekels, and so up went the idol. 2. The men of Dan liked well of spoiling; they were well appointed, their swords were sharp; they did it. 3. They of Gibeah, to their lust, rape seemed a small matter; they were a multitude, no resisting them; and so they committed that abominable villainy. But what, shall this be suffered and no remedy sought? God forbid. First, the eye, error in the eye, is harm enough; and order must be taken even for that. For men do not err in judgment but with hazard of their souls; very requisite, therefore, that men be travailed with, that they may see their own blindness. But, if they be strongly conceited of their own sight, and will not endure any to come near their eyes: if we cannot cure their eyes, what, shall we not hold their hands neither? Yes, in any wise. We see, then, the malady; more than time we sought out a remedy for it. That shall we best do if we know the cause. The cause is here set down. If the cause be there is no king, let there be one: that is the remedy. A good king will help all, if it be of absolute necessity that neither Micah, for all his wealth, nor Dan, for all their forces, nor Gibeah, for all their multitude, do what they list. This is then God's means. We cannot say His only means, in that there are states that subsist without them, but this we may say, His best means—the best for order, peace, strength, steadiness. The next point is, no king in Israel. That this is not noted as a defect in gross, or at large, but even in Israel, God's own chosen people. It is a want, not in Edom or

Canaan, but even in Israel. Truly Israel, being God's own peculiar people, might seem to claim a prerogative above other nations, in this, that they had the knowledge of His laws, whereby their eyes were lightened and their hands taught. Of which there needeth no reason but this: that a king is a good means to keep them God's Israel. Here, for want of a king, Israel began, and was fair onward, to be no longer Israel, but even Babel. I come to the third part: and to what end a king? What will a king do unto us? He will in his general care look to both parts, the eye and the hand—the eye, that men sin not blindly for want of direction; the hand, that men sin not with a high hand for want of correction. But this is not all; the text carrieth us yet further—that it is not only the charge of the king, but the very first article in his charge. (*Bp. Andrewes.*) *Anarchy:* —I. THE TRAGICAL ANTECEDENT: In those days there was no king in Israel. II. THE TERRIBLE CONSEQUENT: Every one did that which was right in their own eyes. III. THE INFALLIBLE CONNECTION BETWEEN THAT CAUSE AND THIS EFFECT. (*Thos. Cartwright, D.D.*) *The evil of unbridled liberty*:—To live as we please would be the ready way to lose our liberty, and undo ourselves. Tyranny itself were infinitely more tolerable than such an unbridled liberty. For that, like a tempest, might throw down here and there a fruitful tree, but this, like a deluge, would sweep away all before it. Many men, many minds, and each strongly addicted to his own. If, therefore, every man should be his own judge, so as to take upon him to determine his own right, and according to such determination to proceed in the maintenance of it, not only the government, but the kingdom itself would quickly come to ruin; and yet admit of the former, and you cannot exclude the latter. Diseases in the eye, errors in the judgment, are dangerous; and there being not one reason in us, there is the more need of one power over us. Yet they who see amiss, hurt none, they say, but themselves; but how if their unquiet opinions will not be kept at home? but prove as thorns in their sides, and will not suffer them to take any rest, till from liberty of thinking, they come to liberty of acting! Nor is there any reason we should be lawless, to do what we please, for we cannot fathom the depth and deceitfulness of our own hearts, much less of the hearts of other men. Only this we know, we are all the worse for that which we mistake for liberty (mistake, I say), for to live as we please is indeed to lose our liberty, of which the law is so far from being an abridgement that it is the only firm foundation upon which it must be built. (*Ibid.*) **The Levite was content.**—*The young Levite; or, rich content*:—His morals were bad, but his spirit of general contentedness was good. Can it be said of men now that they are content? How much unrest is there all around us! The discontented spirit is easily discovered. The merchant, in his office or on the market, makes certain profits, but frets himself that he has not made more. The tradesman bitterly complains of the badness of trade, and the artisan of slackness of work. When he has succeeded in finding employment he will be found quarrelling with the rate of payment. Nor is the discontented spirit confined to the town; it is found in rural districts too. Speak with the occupier, and what a string of complaints he has about home or weather; speak with the wife, and she complains of her wayward family; with the son, and you find that he is weary of country life, and longs for the excitement of a city; with the daughter, and she is annoyed that school life has to be followed by what she terms "home drudgery." You may go away from such a place of beauty in complete disgust. The appearances have completely belied the reality. Even the Indian, for whom a blanket and weapon would appear to suffice, is ofttimes discontented because game is scarce or his maize plot unproductive. It is difficult to find any person who is without some reason for discontent, or any position which places a man beyond its reach. The joy of the early Church (Acts ii. 46) grew out of its contentedness. Its first experience of the results of religion was so joyous that it was a foretaste of millennial bliss. It lasted, unfortunately, too short a time, and yet long enough to show what should be the ideal of life. 1. This "simplicity of heart," this contentedness of mind, is not always inherited, does not always come by nature, but may be obtained. It can only come fully when the heart is at peace with God through Christ. The man is "alive to God." He gives all his affection to God, because he lives in the love which God has to him. His greatest desire is to have his whole nature subdued to Christ, and serve Him in "singleness of heart." 2. Again, this state is not one which comes to all suddenly. Indeed, it comes to most gradually. Paul, the apostle, only attained it by degrees. 3. There is a temporary advantage in discontent. But for dissatisfaction with our spiritual state and progress, we should not strive to make any advance. 4. Look at some of

the results which follow the attainment of the contented spirit. (1) There will be a readiness to make the best of any position in which we may be placed. There was a schoolmaster among the Cumberland Hills, of whom Robertson speaks in one of his lectures—a man who rested content with a very small school, small salary, and small house; though his abilities would have obtained for him a position much higher in the eyes of the world, but who refused every inducement to remove. He said, "I reckon that the privilege of living amid beautiful scenery much more than compensates for a large salary with work in the stifling atmosphere of some town." It is possible, therefore, to gain contentedness in respect to position, and the more surely if we can have the assurance that Christ has taken up His abode in our hearts. (2) Where this spirit obtains, there will be a more cheerful view of life cherished. A little girl once inquired, "Mamma, did the cheerful God make all the beautiful flowers?" The child's idea of God was far higher than of many Christians. Her expression, which was apparently bold, was one indicative of sweet simplicity and "singleness of heart." Would that we could be in spirit as that little child. (3) Where this spirit of content obtains, there will be a more earnest performance of any duty that may fall upon us. That which our hands find to do we shall do with our might. We shall ever search out occasions of usefulness. If we see any wrong, we shall not be content to let it rest. If we see ignorance and sin around, we shall strive to remove it. (4) Where there is this rich content and true "singleness of heart" there will be a clearer and yet clearer perception of God's truth and will. There is a clearness of vision following on "singleness" of desire. (5) Moreover, there will be perfect willingness to leave everything in God's hands. Much of the fret and worry of life will thus be saved. (*F. Hastings.*) **Micah consecrated the Levite.**—*An unauthorised ordination; or, a pastor-elect's recognition services:*—I. THE PASTOR. 1. A recognised minister. 2. Without a charge. 3. Very poor. 4. In search of a ministry. 5. Of a good character. 6. A young pastor. II. THE CALL. 1. Its nature. (1) To a small church. (2) Unanimous. (3) With little inquiries. (4) Upon his own merit. (5) By a very rich church. 2. Its condition. (1) Much respected. (2) Poor stipend. III. THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE CALL. 1. Immediate. 2. Without a scruple. IV. THE RECOGNITION SERVICE. 1. An unauthorised ordination. 2. Without any ceremony. 3. With a good purpose. V. THE GREAT SATISFACTION OF THE CHURCH IN THEIR CHOICE. (*M. Jones.*) **Now know I that the Lord will do me good.**—*The great religious want and mistake of humanity:*—I. THE GREAT RELIGIOUS WANT OF HUMANITY. 1. A friendly relation with the Eternal. 2. Some mediator to procure this friendship. II. THE GREAT RELIGIOUS MISTAKE OF HUMANITY. This man concludes that he shall obtain the Divine favour simply because he has a priest in his house. He may have drawn this false and dangerous conclusion from one of the following popular assumptions: 1. That there was something morally meritorious in merely supporting a minister of the Lord. 2. That the priest would have some special power with Heaven to obtain "good." 3. That by his formally attending to the religious ordinances which this Levite prescribed "the Lord would do him good." (*Homilist.*) *Micah and the Levite:*—I. SELFISHNESS IN RELIGION. This lies at the foundation of Micah's trouble. The institution of Micah's new form of worship had its root in this vice. He did not break away from the old form of things because he was dissatisfied with it, but because it caused self-denial and money to support the established order of worship at Shiloh. It took time to go up there, and means to convey himself and family. Why could he not manage the matter more economically and just as satisfactorily at home, and thus avoid the annoyance and expense? Many a man has made this mistake of Micah, in thinking he could worship God as acceptably in his own way as in any other—in thinking there is no difference between a man-made and a Divinely-appointed religion. In Micah's case selfishness defeated itself, as it does invariably. In departing from the true religion he soon came to have no religion at all. And is not this the inevitable course of religious declension? If I could paint a picture that would preach a sermon, it would be Micah running after his gods and his renegade priest, and crying: "Ye have taken away my gods and my priest, and what have I more?" II. IMITATION IN RELIGION. Micah's worship was a cross between Judaism and heathenism. He had the priest and the ephod on one side, and the molten and graven images on the other. Either he did not perceive the incongruity, or he thought it would make no difference. Some form of worship he considered a necessity. He was not ready to throw religion overboard. His difficulty was in thinking it made little difference after all what kind of religion a

man has so long as he has some form of worship. Having no true idea as to the place of worship, he came soon to have no true idea of worship itself. This is a natural order of declension. Men nowadays break away from the sanctuary, not meaning to give up all religion. Having no stated place of worship, they go here and there for a time, and then cease to go altogether. Breaking with the established order of worship, Micah manufactured a worship of his own. He mistook the sign for the thing signified. His religion was an imitation—a counterfeit—and a counterfeit is more or less a copy of the genuine. Many a man has made this mistake of Micah, in thinking that some religion was better than none—that a poor thing was better than nothing at all. Counterfeits and shams abound in religion. Imitations and incongruities are seen on every hand. One is forced to inquire, "Is there anything real and genuine?" Is every man the maker of his own idols? Is each and every one to be guided by his own ideas of worship? God forbid! If it be so, then unity is impossible, and confusion and bitterness and babble are the inevitable sequence. III. SELF-COMPLACENCY. With his young priest and his heathen gods Micah was satisfied. Because he was, he thought God would be. Hence his complacent utterance: "Now know I that the Lord will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest." We have seen, even in our day, instances not altogether dissimilar. Families depending on the orthodoxy of the Church for the Divine approbation; Churches expecting all will go well from the ecclesiastical standing or ordination vows of their ministers. How often families and Churches and ministers have been disappointed! The truth is, there can be but one way of securing God's blessing, whether for the individual, the family, or the Church. That one way is the way of loving and faithful obedience to His requirements. Not what we think, but what He thinks; not what we consider best, but what He commands, is our duty and happiness. Religion is not a human invention, but a Divine obligation. It is not a matter of mental caprice, but of joyful submission to the will of Heaven. (*W. H. Allbright.*)

CHAPTER XVIII.

VERS. 1–31. The Danites sought them an inheritance. . . . They set them up Micah's graven image.—*The image-worship expanding into tribal idolatry:*—I. THE STRAITS TO WHICH UNBELIEF REDUCES THE STRONG (ver. 1). II. DISCONTENT WITH A DIVINELY-MARKED LOT LEADS TO EVIL (ver. 2). III. TRIFLING CIRCUMSTANCES OFTEN LEAD TO THE DISCOVERY OF SINFUL SCHEMES (ver. 3). IV. SILENT NEGLECT AT FIRST, LEADS AFTERWARDS TO OPEN REJECTION OF GOD'S ORDINANCES (ver. 5). V. THE MOST INOFFENSIVE PEOPLE ARE NOT SAFE FROM THE ATTACKS OF EVIL MEN (vers. 7, 9, 10). VI. RELIGION IS SOMETIMES INVOKED TO AID THE PLOTS OF THE UNGODLY (ver. 5). VII. INDIRECTNESS IS A CHARACTER OF THE WORLD'S COUNSEL (ver. 6). VIII. FALSE WORSHIPPERS TAKE REFUGE IN IMITATING THE APPEARANCES OF THE TRUE (vers. 14, 17). IX. DIVINE PROVIDENCE OFTEN OFFERS NO INTERRUPTION TO THE EXECUTION OF THE DESIGNS OF THE WICKED. X. THE SUDDEN DESTRUCTION OF THE MAN-MADE RELIGION (vers. 15–20). XI. PRAYER WILL NOT SECURE THE DIVINE BLESSING ON A WRONG ACTION (vers. 5, 6, also vers. 18, 19). XII. WORLDLY MINDS CARE LITTLE FOR ACCURACY IN SPIRITUAL THINGS (vers. 17–19). XIII. NEITHER MORAL PRINCIPLE NOR SOUND REASON CAN BE EXPECTED OF THOSE WHO DENY TO GOD HIS NATURAL RIGHTS. XIV. SUCCESS IN EVIL IS NO PROOF OF THE DIVINE APPROVAL. XV. TRUE SERVICE IS NOT TO BE EXPECTED FROM A FALSE PRIEST (ver. 20). XVI. THE EXCESSIVE IMPORTANCE WHICH AN IDOLATER ATTACHES TO HIS GODS (ver. 24). (*J. P. Millar.*) **Ask counsel, we pray thee, of God.**—*Counsel of God:*—Seeking counsel of God is the first duty of Christian men. I. WHY WE SHOULD ASK. 1. On account of our ignorance and short-sightedness. The way before us dark, uncertain. So reason would suggest to ask, &c. It is the course God's people have ever adopted. See Jacob at Bethel (Gen. xxvii. 20); Moses (Exod. xxxiii. 12); David (2 Sam. vii. 29). 2. On account of God's ability to give. He knows all the way before us. 3. On account of the fact that our best interests are involved in the counsel God can give. It is like the pillar and cloud, the compass of the mariner, light of day, &c. II. WHAT WE MAY ASK. 1. As to our temporal concerns. Duties in the world, engagements, plans, and changes. 2. As to our relative concerns. Families, children, friends, &c. So

Abraham and David; so all the truly pious. 3. As to our spiritual concerns. The way of experimental piety, usefulness, &c. Influence for good. The text speaks of the "way being prosperous." III. How WE MUST ASK. 1. With a deep conviction of our exigency. Not self-sufficient. 2. With believing confidence. The promises are abundant for every scene. To lead, direct, keep, deliver, strengthen, protect, sanctify, save; hence we must calmly look and plead. 3. With a resolution to follow the counsel. 4. Through the person and advocacy of Christ. (*J. Burns, D.D.*) We have seen the land, and behold, it is very good.—*Report from the promised land*:—This was a model report, because it urged the brethren to take advantage of an opportunity that meant benefit to themselves. The believer in Jesus Christ is an explorer, and he brings back a report to his brethren who are unbelievers. Religion, like science, to be exact, must be grounded in truth and fact. We listen to Livingstone and believe him, as we would but few who might tell us of the wastes of Africa, for we know that he has seen. Let your life be a life fragrant with peace, a life unselfish, devoted, Christ-like, a life of beauty, and it will bring a winning report of the land, and your hearers will say, "We will go with you. It will be a good land, for God is with you." Suppose a man from the cold and cheerless Arctic comes here. He comes from a land of chill and blasts, where the sun's warmth never falls, where no birds sing, and where flowers never bloom. Suppose a man from this zone of the Arctic were to come to our city and open an office upon Broadway. How many would listen and go back with him to the terrors of that frozen north? But suppose a man from the sunny south should come. He would tell of the birds that sing the whole year round, of the flowers that bloomed season after season, and the bubbling streams that flowed on for ever. Which of the two would repel and which attract? God's people are weak. Do not attribute their failures to the land from which they come. Do not set your reproof against the land. It is a glorious land. Go and make that land your land, your hope and your eternity. (*W. T. Sabine.*) And are ye still?—*Indifference to religion*:—It may be that we wonder at the slowness of the Danites—wonder that they should hesitate to press forward and possess themselves of such an earthly inheritance; of such an inheritance because it was a part of the land promised by God to their fathers. May we not, however, be the more astonished at ourselves, as we remember our own indifference towards a heavenly inheritance? The habitation we now hold, straitened as it is, and but for time, must be resigned at the call of death, whether we have made any advance towards the heavenly inheritance or not. And why are we still? Is it because we are required to withdraw our affections from the earth? If so, we are to be gainers by it (1 Peter i. 4). And we ourselves often profess a desire to possess such a home. And often do we picture to ourselves a home where all that renders this life painful will be found no more. We desire a land which is "very good." Such a home, such a land, God's Word speaks of to us, and says that it is laid up for those who seek it (1 Cor. ii. 9). Yet few of us really seek this home; and so, in the words of the spies, we are again and again rebuked for our indifference. "Behold the land is very good: and are ye still? be not slothful to go, and to enter to possess the land." Now the spies declared, concerning the people of Laish: "When ye go, ye shall come unto a people secure, and to a large land." 1. The security here alluded to was a false security. It was that careless indifference to danger—that want of thought for their own safety—which the people of Laish indulged. There was peace about them. They did not think of the possibility of its being broken. They, in fact, prepared the way for their own destruction. And Holy Scripture tells us who seek the heavenly inheritance: "When ye go ye shall come unto a people secure, and to a large land." But this security is a true one (2 Sam. xxii. 2, 3). 2. It is a large land. In it we shall dwell in peace with those who now enjoy its blessedness. Our entrance there will be followed by the gift of our God to us of fuller measures of love. Could we possibly desire a life more blessed than this?—a life passed with angels, and archangels, and all God's faithful ones. "Behold," then, "the land is very good, and the people dwell secure: and are ye still?" In order to rouse their countrymen, and to hasten them forward towards Laish, the spies declared, "God hath given it into your hands." Now these words either set forth the faith of the spies, and mean, "God will give it into your hands," or they refer to God's promise of old to Abraham (Gen. xv. 18), and mean, "Know ye not that it is yours already by promise? God hath given it into your hands, since He sware unto Abraham that he and his seed should possess it." And we would borrow their words, and say of heaven, "God hath given it

into your hands." For ever since the Saviour shed His blood for you, heaven has been purchased thereby for your everlasting inheritance. Heirs, by promise, thereof, your baptism made you. Citizens of heaven ye are now. Take heed that ye forfeit not, by following the world and its lusts, your citizenship. Moreover, it was not purchased to be bestowed arbitrarily, and after the manner of men, upon a few. And this is evident from the whole of our blessed Lord's teaching. "In it there are many mansions." "It is a large country." And though many have passed from the earth, and are sure to enter it, "yet there is room." But for whom is their room? Oh, not for the proud and the haughty. Not for those who cry "Lord, Lord," yet do not the things which He hath commanded. Not for those who love this present world, yet profess to seek a better, but are still! There is room in heaven for the poor and humble in spirit, for those who follow "temperance, soberness, and chastity." The spies also sought to urge their countrymen on by declaring, concerning Laish, that it was "a place where there is no want of anything that is in the earth." So tempting a prize as this would, we should think, put away all hesitation, all fear of difficulties. And we declare the same of heaven. The blessings offered to the Danites had respect unto the present life. The blessings offered to us are those of the eternal life with God in heaven. Do you desire peace? It is there. Heaven is the abode of holiness; and where holiness is, there also is peace. Do you desire joy? It is there. In heaven sorrows and tears are not. Do you desire security? In heaven nothing shall disturb your peace, nothing shall diminish your joy. Do you long to offer unto God a worship holy and undefiled? In heaven you shall offer it. There you will join the sinless angels, and "the just made perfect," and with them worship and adore your God. (*C. P. Longland.*) **Be not slothful to go, and to enter to possess the land.**—*Practical attention to religion:*—I. SOME CONSIDERATIONS TO INDUCE AN EARNEST, PRACTICAL ATTENTION TO RELIGION. 1. Consider the glory and the grandeur of the inheritance to which you aspire. You see much of the wisdom of God in furnishing figurative descriptions of the blessedness of heaven. 2. Consider the encouraging assurances we have of success in our pursuit. 3. Consider the danger of remissness and indifference where interests so momentous are at stake. II. BRIEF SUGGESTIONS AS TO THE MEANS OF PROMOTING SPIRITUALITY OF MIND. 1. Endeavour to form a high standard of that holiness of character in which fitness for heaven consists. 2. Serious and devout meditation upon the Word of God should form a part of the business of every day. 3. Cultivate a devotional spirit. (*Homiletic Magazine.*) **Fetched the carved image, the ephod, and the teraphim.**—*The stolen gods:*—Micah and his household worshipping the images of silver, the Levite officiating at the altar, seeking counsel of Jehovah by ephod and teraphim, the Danites who steal the gods, carry off the priest, and set up a new worship in the city they build—all these represent to us types and stages of what is really schism, pitiful and disastrous—that is, separation from the truth of things and from the sacred realities of Divine faith. Selfish untruth and infidelity are schism, the wilderness and outlawry of the soul. 1. Micah and his household, with their chapel of images, their ephod and teraphim, represent those who fall into the superstition that religion is good as insuring temporal success and prosperity, that God will see to the worldly comfort of those who pay respect to Him. Even among Christians this is a very common and a very debasing superstition. The sacraments are often observed as signs of a covenant which secures for men Divine favour through social arrangements and human law. The spiritual nature and power of religion are not denied, but they are uncomprehended. The national custom and the worldly hope have to do with the observance of devout forms rather than any movement of the soul heavenward. A Church may in this way become like Micah's household, and prayer may mean seeking good terms with Him who can fill the land with plenty or send famine and cleanness of teeth. 2. The Levite represents an unworthy, worldly ministry. Very few of those in the ranks of the Christian ministry are entirely concerned with the respect paid to them in society and the number of shekels to be got in a year. That he keeps pace with the crowd instead of going before it is perhaps the hardest thing that can be said of the worldly pastor. He is humane, active, intelligent; but it is for the Church as a great institution, or the Church as his temporal hope and stay. So his ministry becomes at the best a matter of serving tables and providing alms—we shall not say amusement. Here, indeed, is schism; for what is farther from the truth of things, from Christ? 3. Once more, we have with us to-day, very much with us, certain Danites of science, politics, and the press, who, if they could,

would take away our God and our Bible, our Eternal Father and spiritual hope, not from a desire to possess, but because they hate to see us believing, hate to see any weight of silver given to religious uses. Not a few of these are marching, as they think, triumphantly to commanding and opulent positions, whence they will rule the thought of the world. And on the way, even while they deride and detest the supernatural, they will have the priest go with them. They care nothing for what he says; to listen to the voice of a spiritual teacher is an absurdity of which they would not be guilty; for to their own vague prophesying all mankind is to give heed, and their interpretations of human life are to be received as the Bible of the age. Of the same order is the socialist who would make use of a faith he intends to destroy, and a priesthood whose claim is offensive to him, on his way to what he calls the organisation of society. In his view the uses of Christianity and the Bible are temporal and earthly. He will not have Christ the Redeemer of the soul, yet he attempts to conjure with Christ's words, and appropriate the power of His name. The audacity of these would-be robbers is matched only by their ignorance of the needs and ends of human life. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*) **Ye have taken away my gods.**—*The loss of gods*:—I. ALL MEN HAVE A GOD. 1. Whatever a man's god be, he deems it the greatest good. 2. But man's ideas of God are very deficient and conflicting. Some make a god of the means of gratifying their passions and lusts; others make money and riches their god; others the praise and approbation of their fellow-creatures, and others the outward rites and ceremonies of religion. 3. It is one thing to be religious; another and a very different matter to be godly, worshipping the Father "in spirit and in truth." II. FALSE GODS CAN BE TAKEN FROM THEIR DEVOTEES. 1. Often in life. Many, long before they die, lose the means of gratifying sense; many, early in life, though lovers of money, become pitifully poor; and many, by some means or other, are deprived of the means to pursue their accustomed mode of attending to religious rites, and therefore lose their gods. 2. In death. Sense cannot be gratified in the grave. No miser has ever been able to take a grain of his adored money to another world. The world's praise and blame are equally unimportant when a man feels he is to be ushered before the judgment-seat; and all religious rites and formularies are left behind for ever when we enter a world of spirits. III. THE LOSS, EVEN OF A FALSE GOD, WILL BE FELT TO BE A GREAT LOSS. "What have I more?" To tear the thing we have made our god from us is the greatest bereavement. Even though the thing is bad, it has been loved supremely, and the loss of it will create a vacuum and an agony intolerable. But the conscious loss of the true God—this is the climax of suffering. Then the soul is a chaos, an orphan in the universe. (*Homilist.*) *Micah the Ephraimite*:—Consider the plan of life he made, and the reason why it turned out so badly. 1. He was not a heathen, though he was an idolater. He thought to serve God through the medium of idols. It was more comfortable to remain at home, and it was more easy to worship by means of what could be seen. He was like people who say that it is not necessary to go to church, because they can read the Bible and say their prayers at home; as if reading the Bible and saying prayers were the whole duty of the man! He was also like those who think that worship must be comfortable: they are not called upon to rise early or to adopt more than a sitting posture. You can see what the influence of idols would become in this man's life. Micah would gradually forget the unseen world of which they were supposed to remind him, and his image-shop would call for his constant care and attention. What soul he possessed would be centred there, and the presence of the Levite would soothe him with the notion that all was well. Nor was the life a lonely one, for others, it seems, lived near, and took an interest in the carved image, the ephod, the teraphim, and molten image: in fact, there was quite a comfortable little schism formed into which no one was likely to inquire. Such was the plan of Micah's religious life—a cheap one, you will observe, in spite of the ten shekels of silver and apparel and victuals, for no journeys need now be undertaken to other seats of worship, and no money offered to them. 2. And why did such an inexpensive way of serving God fail? Some rude travellers robbed him of his gods and his priest, and what had he more? It might have been possible to replace them, but the cost would have been much; besides, he had grown fond of these images, and this priest, and his heart was with them. It was too late to begin life again, and such handsome images it would be difficult to make. All might still have been well had he known what worship meant, but unfortunately in his service of God he had left out God. "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." Is

there anything akin to us in the character of this poor man, who began by cheating others and ended by being cheated himself? 1. True religion cannot be easy, at least at first. It never can be cheap. To do God's will entails the sacrifice of ourselves, soul and body, to the Almighty. And so easy-going religion is popular. Men will not go far to a service. If they have their temple at their door they can drag their wearied limbs so far, but, unlike their forefathers, they do not care to walk a few miles to God's house. As for time and money, what a little suffices often to soothe the sleepy conscience! 2. Micah's religion was self-made. Has he not followers in those who teach that we can please ourselves in the manner and method of worship? Is it perfectly immaterial whether our Saviour made a Church or not, whether we continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayer, or not? And if these things do matter, surely they are worth a little hard thought. "We are all going the same way," people tell you. Yet it is inconceivable that all can be equally right. Are we not bound to give, each for himself, a reason for the form of the faith we hold? 3. Micah's religion failed him. His gods were taken away, and his priest, and what had he more? God was left out of sight. We can take the warning to ourselves. Our religion, it may be, has been largely outward: we have said formal prayers morning and evening; we have come to church and gone through services; we have read a few verses of the Bible as a disagreeable duty; we have hoped all was well; and suddenly, a big blow falls—and where are we? Is our religion a comfort? does it help to support us? Not a bit. Why? Because it was only skin-deep. (*W. R. Hutton, M.A.*) *The stable and the unstable in religion*:—This story has but a faint analogy with what I wish to speak of—but yet it illustrates a principle applicable in all ages, that essential religion is something which cannot be stolen. Now there are all sorts of Danites—real hostile Danites, and men accounted such by timid souls who are not so at all. There are ruthless Danites, whose honest, or dishonest, aim it is to remove what they really seem to think religion is wrapped up in. And then there are friendly Danites, who would remove idol images out of a real love for a more spiritual and vital faith. But whoever the Danites be, this is true—that nobody is afraid of the Danites unless he has gotten a Micah religion; and nobody encourages the raids and raileries of the Danites—"What aileth thee?"—like the man who cries, "What have I more?" I. ANY RELIGION WHICH CENTRES IN A FORM OR ORGANISATION CAN BE STOLEN. This is only to say that external aids to devotion, and diverse organisation of God's host may be changed, and yet destroy none but a Micah faith which is wrapped up in them. But what has seemed so permanent and vital at different times, and to different souls, is just this very thing! The Micah faith of the Jews could be, must be, stolen away. But what was permanent? Reverence and worship of Almighty God. Again, take the New Testament. It was a zeal in God's name by which Jesus Himself cleansed the temple of His Father! And who ever stole away the Micah elements of religion as did our Lord Himself, in mingled love and indignation for God's eternal law? Again, have you ever realised that the great argument all through the Epistles of Paul is just this carrying-off process of that system, glorious in its purity and needed for its day, but now to pass, in its essential elements, into a different form of growth? His great contention everywhere is that there were shadow and substance both in the old Mosaic economy; that form was vanishing, its truth permanent; that Christ had fulfilled, or filled full, those great moral and spiritual needs of men which once were best fed by other means. Did He take away a single element that was permanent? II. STANDARDS OF WHAT IS RIGHT AND WRONG IN CONDUCT MAY BE STOLEN, and yet not carry off the eternal obligations of mortality. How often people have been trying to say that this, that, and the other thing is eternally right or wrong for everybody and all nations to do or not to do! It is this spirit which goes to the Bible, and in Leviticus and Ecclesiastes, as well as in John and Romans, would find, on one level of authority, some word to decide, as by a talisman, whether this or that is consistent for everybody everywhere to do or not to do. How this confuses and misrepresents the Bible! The Bible is a book of life, and so it has progressively changed and raised its forms of moral obligation from age to age. Right in the midst of the Old Testament, like a lighthouse in a storm, stand the ten commandments—true, not because they are there, but there because universally true; and yet even they are not true because that is the best or highest form of moral obligation; for Jesus says of that law, "It says so and so, but 'I' say"—carrying those same principles further and higher, and adding entirely new and deeper

motives and sanctions. Negative "Thou shalt not" accomplishes for one man or one age what Jesus' positive "Thou shalt love" does for another—two forms of the same thing. See the progress in Bible standards! 1. Thou shalt not do wrong. 2. Thou shalt love God and man. 3. Love one another, "as I have loved you." There is a vast difference between these three ways of looking at one thing. III. What is true of forms of worship and standards of morals is true also of FORMS AND PROPORTIONS OF THEOLOGICAL ISSUES. Judged by the Micah creeds of men we might suppose the Christian world would have nothing left of faith after the Danites of each generation had carried away some things upon which everything seemed to hang. We are living in a time when hosts of Christian people think the ark of God is in danger as it never was before. But when was there an age in which people did not say the same thing? This is said to be an era of readjustment and revolution. Yes; but so has nearly every age been accounted since Jesus came, if we may judge from the fearful auguries of every century. There are always some people perfectly sure if this or that doctrine is not held just as their fathers, or their Church or themselves hold it, that men are cutting loose from all sure anchorage. The reassuring thing is that that is just what men have always been saying, and yet despite dark doubt and augury, hostile Danites, and men so counted Danites in one age to be canonised in the next, have all stolen only what was either false or only one-sided and temporary. There is not a great fact or essential truth of Christian revelation which is not held as firmly this very day as ever before. (*A. R. Merriam.*) *The Indian problem* :—Do we consider that a man situated as this man was a fit object of pity and sympathy or not? The stern, uncompromising iconoclast would certainly say, "No." He would feel that it was better for such an one to find out by bitter experience how vain and useless were the idols in which he trusted. In and through his desolation he might be brought to seek for help where alone it could be found. The mild, tolerant student of comparative religion would probably say, "Yes." He would urge on his behalf that at that particular point in the evolution of Jewish religion from its primitive worship of invisible forces it was inevitable that the worshipper should seek to give concrete form and embodiment to the anthropomorphic idea of God which was then being assimilated from the nations around. For such an one to be deprived of his idols was to be put out of *rapport* and correspondence with his religious environment, and as that meant spiritual death, he clearly deserves our pity in his destitution. Turning, however, from the merely speculative interest which the ancient Israelite's case presents, I wish to transfer it, "as in a figure," to the very real and practical interest presented by the parallel situation of a large section of our fellow-subjects in India, and to endeavour to answer the question just raised by considering what our duty to them is. For in the main the plea of the Jew of Mount Ephraim is being echoed now either in unexpressed feeling or in outspoken utterance by thousands of religious-minded Hindus in India. It is only with one portion of the problem that I would attempt to deal; that, namely, which is connected with the sphere of Christian education. It would be to repeat an oft-told tale to recount at any length what has been and will be increasingly the necessary result of such contact of the West with the East as our rule in India has brought about. That contact is unique and unprecedented in some if not all of its conditions, and must be expected to produce strange and unlooked-for, even contradictory, results. But it is of the moral aspect of them only that I wish to speak. When the Government of India decided that State education must be conducted on the principle of religious neutrality and non-interference, it does not appear whether the disintegrating effect of purely secular instruction was fully realised. What, in short, was not foreseen, but is now being daily found to be the inevitable result of the State system of education, is that while it tends to destroy much that was hurtful and fatal to progress, it fails to supply the place of what it destroys by any new and vital principle of cohesion and solidarity. The son goes back to his home and announces to his parents that he has learnt to rise superior to caste traditions and prejudices, and it is found that what this amounts to practically is, that while he has a veneer of Western learning and science, he has lost his hold of what is the very life and soul of any society, the sense of obedience, of reverence, of duty in the family and in the State. He has gained, indeed, ideas of freedom, of independence, of equality, of self-assertion, but if he has lost or is in danger of losing these other ideas, which surely it is true to say are more fundamental and indispensable for the well-being of the family and the nation, is not the loss likely to be greater than the gain, at any rate for the Indian? If there is any virtue which the caste system

can claim to have developed and preserved, it is the instinct of reverence and obedience. And it is this instinct which it is the tendency of our education to weaken if not to destroy. And further, it is precisely in those parts of India which are most advanced in Western knowledge where this tendency is seen in its fullest development. What wonder is it, then, that the parent who hears of the boasted advantages of Western science and education bewails the result of it in words which seem an echo of the cry of the Jew of Mount Ephraim "Ye have taken away my gods which I made, and what have I more? and how then say ye unto me, What aileth thee?" But this is not all. The student, bereft of the moral sanctions of his religion, and supplied with no new motives of obedience and rectitude, is exposed to yet other dangers. If the demon of superstition has been expelled, there are the seven other spirits more wicked than the first, ready to rush in and occupy the vacant, cheerless room. For the mental facilities of the Indian student are far in advance of his moral faculties. This is so naturally; and when the course of education tends almost exclusively to develop the intellectual part of him, the disparsity becomes all the more marked. The moral element in him, already of weakened vitality, is gradually starved out, and the struggle for superiority is rather between the animal and the intellectual. There are many noble exceptions, but they cannot redeem a system which condemns the majority to moral sterility. It is to the Christian Church, and that alone, that we must turn for the assertion and vindication of the principles of true reform, as well as for the moral dynamic which is to energise and embody them in and through an actual visible living society. And it is quite wonderful to notice how India's need of the gospel is being recognised on all sides and in the most unexpected quarters. The politician looks to the spread of Christianity as one great source of strength and stability for the permanence of British Empire. The educationalist looks to our native Christian women as at present the most hopeful means of making female education effective among the upper classes. Sir W. W. Hunter has lately said, "Christianity holds out advantages of social organisation not offered by Hinduism or Islam. It provides for the education and moral supervision of its people with a pastoral care which Islam, destitute of a regular priesthood, does not pretend to. It receives the new members into its body with a cordiality and a completeness to which Hinduism is a stranger. I believe," he says, "it is reserved for Christianity to develop the highest uses of Indian caste, 'as a system of conservative socialism.' . . . But it will be Indian caste humanised by a new spiritual life." Or to take one or two more specific cases. The tahsíldár or head native officer of a large country town appeals to a missionary to send a Christian teacher for a Hindu school, because he finds the Hindu teachers have yielded to the prevailing immorality of the town. The municipality of a large city in the Punjab appoints a native Christian minister its chairman because they can find no other man so high-minded and honest for the post. The only great modern religious reformer India has produced bore witness on his death-bed to India's need of Christ. When the man of Macedonia stood before St. Paul that night in the vision, did not the pathos of the cry, "Come over and help us," arise from the very fact of its being the unconscious appeal of the heathen world for help? And if the response to that cry was the mission to Europe, which was the origin and cause of all that is highest and best and noblest in our life and thought here to-day, shall the Church's response to India's cry be less prompt, less devoted, less full of faith and hope and love, when she has that greatest of all examples to inspire and stimulate her, the experience of the power of the message he bore to support and guide her in her task, the certainty of final victory, not in our time, but in God's time, to cheer and encourage her till Christ comes to claim the kingdom for His own? (*S. S. Allnutt, M.A.*) And what have I more?—*The beyond in religion*:—It was natural that Micah should deplore the loss of his images. We may smile at his grief, and say that he was a very ignorant and a very superstitious man. Doubtless he might have reflected that the loss was not irreparable; doubtless he might have consoled himself with the thought of what remained. And yet we, with our purer faith and nobler creed, need to remind ourselves that such superstition is not altogether unknown amongst us. There has always been a tendency to mistake the outward and visible for the inward and spiritual, to think or to act as if these were all, and to forget the beyond; even to imagine that if these are withdrawn and taken from us, then all is gone and nothing more is left. Idolatry in its grosser forms has passed away, and it is not likely to return; but the tendency still exists to pay undue deference to and to depend upon what is visible and material and transitory,

while we ignore those unseen and abiding elements in which alone the true vitality of religion consists. Let us trace this tendency in three directions. 1. Religion is enshrined in ceremonies. Forms may be not only useful in religion, they are to a certain extent necessary. In Christian worship there has always been more or less of form, ceremonial, ritual. Men have tried at various times to maintain a religion which should be purely spiritual, but the effort has not in the long run been successful. In early days Christian worship was severely simple. It was so partly by design, in contrast with the sensuous materialism of surrounding idolatry; partly of necessity, because of the poverty of the worshippers. In later times came the elaboration of ceremonial. The question for us is, What have we more? Do our worship, our ceremonies lead us to what is beyond? Are we relying on the accessories, or on the everlasting truths they enshrine? What have we more? I may, for instance, be accustomed to a place of worship where the services are rendered with the most exquisite musical taste, where the art of the sculptor or the painter ministers to my sense of culture and refinement; but what have I more? If altered circumstances should force me to worship with none of those surroundings, could I know that there in the meanest and poorest temple is no less the presence of God? If I should be condemned as an invalid to pass weary months and even years within the four walls of my sick-room, could I rest in the assurance that still Christ is with me, and that possessing Him I possess all things? This is to penetrate into the kernel of religion; this is to have the power as well as the form of godliness, and it is to this that all form, all ritual, should lead up, and without this they profit nothing. 2. But religion is not only enshrined in form; it is embodied in phrases. Churches have their creeds and their catechisms. Religious truth must find its expression in doctrine, in portable forms which are easily remembered, though the doctrine probably expresses very inadequately the truth it inculcates. A sound creed is the basis of a strong character. Words are the necessary embodiment of truth. But there is always a danger lest the mere framework of words be taken as a substitute for the truth it indicates. There are those who worship, instead of a living Christ, their own wooden and stony forms of theology, which may leave them just as hard and just as narrow and just as loveless as any other form of superstition. The history of Christianity is full of examples. This tendency to depend on words is especially seen in the decadence of any religious movement. Phrases which were at one time pregnant with meaning are repeated with parrot-like accuracy by those who are very far from being animated by their spirit. They think that because they have the words they must also have the truth. "What have I more?" We have our doctrines, our creeds, our catechisms; but do they lead us to what is beyond? Do we reach forth with the strong grasp of a living faith to the unchanging and eternal truths which the words embody? Do you remember that it is one thing to say, "I believe in God," another to believe in God with heart and soul as the great Factor in our lives? Phrases may change; but God does not change. Truth cannot change, though it may be conveyed through different means. Creed is important, but character is greater than creed. Life is more than orthodoxy, and goodness than correct opinions. 3. Once more, religion is not only enshrined in ceremonies and creeds, but also in persons. When St. Paul says that the Church is the "body of Christ," he implies that our Lord works through Christian people, and that they are His representatives on earth. As a matter of fact all our earlier impressions, and many of our later impressions, in religion, have come to us through persons. The mother who taught our infant lips to pray, the teacher who first instructed us in the simple truths of the gospel, the pastor at whose feet we sat as children, the friend so noble and so brave on whom we leaned for counsel and guidance—these and others were those who first brought religion to our notice as the great power in the world. And no one can overrate the power and the value of religious training and Christian friendship. But yet even the best and purest and holiest of earthly influences may sometimes be almost the idol, whose removal may be the wreck of our hopes. I sometimes tremble for the religion of the young lad who goes forth from a holy and happy village home into the crowded thoroughfares of the great city. Will he stand fast in the future? Will he be true to the teaching of his boyhood in the presence of increasing temptations? Will he keep to the old faith in the land that is new? He will not, if his faith is merely second-hand. He will not if he has never really made his parents' belief to be his own belief. The great question is, "What have I more?" I have Christian influence around me, I have religious friends; but what have I more? If God should see fit to take away these, have I

learnt to trust in the one Friend from whom neither distance nor death can part? Can I lean on Him when every earthly prop is removed? Some years ago I was called to visit an aged lady who was on her death-bed. She was a very sincere Christian, who had led an exceptionally useful life of active benevolence. But she had drunk deep of the cup of sorrow; she had been reduced through monetary losses to comparative poverty; her husband had deserted her, and she had few, if any, relatives who could help her. And as I sat by her bedside, a few hours before her death, she talked of her trials, her sorrows, her losses, when, suddenly raising herself, she pointed upward to a text above her bed, and said, "But I have found that true all along." I looked up and read the text. It was the familiar promise, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Yes, earthly friends might fail and leave her, but there was One who would never forsake her, the unchanging Friend who had strengthened and supported her in life as in death. Certainly the day will come to us all when all earthly helps will leave us, and we shall have to fall back on the unseen realities, or on—nothing. At such a time, if ever, we shall need to depend on the reality and not the shadow. No forms, no phrases, no friends can help us then. Nothing but the living Christ can then be our strength and stay; He and He only can say, "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee." May God keep us from trusting in the shadow rather than the substance. "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee. Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever." (*Christian World Pulpit.*)

CHAPTER XIX.

VERS. 1–30. Whither goest thou? and whence comest thou?—*The past and the future:*—These two questions were usually proposed of old to the traveller, by the inhabitants of any district through which he might be passing; nor were they unnatural in a state of society wherein the infrequency of journeying must have rendered the appearance of a stranger a matter of curiosity, and where, owing to the want of houses of public entertainment, hospitality was an important and necessary duty. What are we all, in truth, but wayfaring men—journeying towards a city of habitation? We are, like this Levite, sojourners passing through the streets—guests that tarry but a night, and who require only a temporary shelter. Whence come we? and whither are we going? 1. The former of these questions, if generally considered, might be answered by remembering that we have no reason to vaunt of our origin, since that is but of yesterday, and of the earth. "Why is dust and ashes proud?" If a recollection of our lowly origin might thus subdue the imperious, and liberalise the selfish, a sense of our sinful extraction ought in no less measure to abase the self-dependent. "Whence come we?" Some among us have come from the suffering of affliction. Have we been purified in that furnace? Has the storm, pelting on the wayfaring man, accelerated his homeward pace? Others have come from experiencing remarkable instances of the Divine mercy. They have come from some of the smooth plots of greensward, the isles of palm-trees in the waste. How have they profited by the blessing? Have they thanklessly attributed their success to good fortune, or boldly to their own arm, instead of acknowledging the hand of the Father of lights? Have they tithed the bounty to poverty and distress? 2. It has been said (though the remark is a quaint conceit) that the heathen deity Janus, from whom the first month in our year derives its name, was described in the ancient mythology as having two faces, the one looking on the past, and the other on the future. But there hardly needs so fanciful an allusion as this to advance our contemplations from the irrevocable past to the solemn future. On that future let us next direct our forethought, turning our attention from our origin to our destination, "Whither goest thou?" We are travelling in a circle. We are hastening back to the earth, from whence we proceeded. Dust we are, and unto dust we shall return. 3. Place now these two questions together; view the line of life from its commencement to its termination; consider the past with reference to the future, and the future as a continuation of the past. If there be any who have arrived at the present season from a

year, or a life, which they can review only with shame and sorrow—who, to the question, "Whence comest thou?" can only reply, like Satan to Jehovah, "We come from going to and fro in the earth, and from wandering up and down in it"—let them think of the end of those hitherto squandered days, to which they are ever speeding, and know not how near they are come, that they may, if possible, redeem the time that is past, and improve that which is passing. (*J. Grant, M.A.*)

Let all thy wants be upon me.—*Helping others:*—1. This old man's practice commends to us a double duty: the one that we should be ready to remove grief from our brethren, and to quiet their troubled minds as we may. For grief and heaviness do much hinder the mind from doing any duty; especially they being deeply seated in the heart, and turbulent passions of themselves, and therefore the easing it of them is a setting of it at liberty. 2. The second duty we learn is more particularly the duty of hospitality; which as far as need required he did unto this Levite. The like kindness is to be showed by us to strangers sad in heart, being known to be brethren, that they be used of us kindly and in all courtesy, but in no wise to grieve them, being already heavy-hearted. (*R. Rogers.*)

Consider of it, take advice, and speak your minds.—*Deliberation:*—I. THERE ARE SOME ACTIONS SO SHOCKING THAT ALL MEN DO, upon the first hearing of them, without taking time to consider, without asking the opinion of others, UNANIMOUSLY AGREE TO CONDEMN THEM. Now, amongst those truths which do thus gain our assent upon the first view I think we may justly reckon those judgments which we form concerning the essential differences of moral good and evil. For our sight is not more quick in discerning the variety of figures and colours, nor more taken with the beauty of some, or displeased with the deformity of others; the nicest ear hath not a more distinct perception of the harmony or discord of sounds; nor doth the most delicate palate more accurately distinguish tastes than our intellectual faculties do apprehend the plain distinction between right and wrong, honest and dishonest, good and evil, and find an agreeableness and satisfaction in the one, a disagreeableness and dissatisfaction in the other. And it is for very wise and good reasons that God hath so formed our faculties that concerning such actions as are extraordinary in either kind, such as are extremely good or extremely wicked, all men should be able to judge thus readily and thus truly. For, in human life, it often happens that an occasion is given us of doing some great good, or a temptation laid before us to commit some great evil, when there is no leisure allowed us of entering into a long deliberation, in which cases it is necessary that we should act according to our present light; and therefore by Providence wisely ordered that we should enjoy such open daylight that there should be no danger of our stumbling. By this method God hath made the same wholesome provision for the security of our souls as He hath done for preserving the health of our bodies. To such meats as might prove noxious to us, and being once taken down, digested, and mingled with the mass of our blood might quickly destroy our lives, we have often so strong an antipathy that we refrain from them merely on account of this natural aversion, without considering the mischievous consequences that might arise from our indulging ourselves in them; and in the like manner, those sins which carry with them the greatest malignity, and which are most perilous to the souls of men, do create in our minds an utter abhorrence. II. Although such actions do at the first view appear very odious, yet in order to confirm or rectify our first judgments IT IS PROPER TO CONSIDER THEM FARTHER, AND TO TAKE IN THE ADVICE OF OTHERS. When a thing appears crooked to the eye upon the first view, we cannot but pay so much deference to the testimony of our senses as to presume it such; but because this appearance may sometimes proceed from a defect in the organ, and not from any real crookedness in the object, for our better satisfaction we measure it by a rule, and then pronounce with more certainty concerning it. And the same method we ought to observe in judging of moral actions; if they, at the first sight, appear notoriously wicked, we cannot but entertain a violent suspicion of their being such; but because this appearance may arise from some corruption of our judgment, when there is no obliquity in the actions themselves, the best way to prevent all possibility of error will be to examine them by the only infallible test, the law of God. But this sentence will carry still more weight if we do not depend too much upon our own judgments, but call in the advice of others. Men are so apt to differ in their opinions, and take so great a delight in contradicting each other, that those truths must carry with them a more than ordinary degree of evidence in which all or most men do agree. He who considers what a wide difference there is in the ways of men's thinking and judging, from the difference of their complexions, tempers,

education, character, profession, age, religion, and other innumerable specialities by which they are distinguished one from another, and disposed to form very different judgments concerning the same persons or things, will not be surprised to find that several men do seldom concur in the verdict which they pass upon those actions that fall within their observation. Some speculative truths there are in which the interests of men being not at all concerned all may unanimously agree; some rules of life there may be, though these much fewer than the other, which most men may join in the approbation of; some virtues and vices which, considered abstractedly and without regard to persons, they may agree to praise or to condemn, but when they come to judge of actions, not as they are in idea and theory, but as they are in reality and fact, nor as they are in books, but as they are performed by such and such men, here several things will offer themselves to influence and bias their judgments. When, therefore, notwithstanding there are so many and strong obstacles to hinder men from concurring in their opinions, any actions are condemned by a general consent, this unanimity of judgment is, though not a demonstrative proof, yet a very strong presumption, that such actions are notoriously wicked, and in reality such as they do universally appear. III. When any actions do, both at the first view and also upon farther inquiry, appear very flagitious, we should then, without any reserve, OPENLY AND FREELY SPEAK OUR MINDS CONCERNING THEM. A mark of infamy hath, by the universal consent of all civilised nations, been set upon some actions, tending either to the great disparagement of human nature, or to the great disturbance of civil societies, that a sense of shame and fear of disgrace might be powerful curbs to restrain men from doing such vile things as would be sure to stain their reputations, and to fix an indelible blot of ignominy upon their memories. The greatest mischief that can possibly be done to the souls of men is to discourage them from doing their duty by speaking evil of what God hath commanded, and to encourage them in the commission of sin by speaking well of what God hath condemned, and therefore a woe is justly denounced by the prophet Isaiah against those who call good evil and evil good. But the interests of virtue and piety are also very much endamaged by those who, though they do not go so far as to call evil good, do yet, by a criminal silence, forbear to call it evil; and therefore those priests are accused by God of violating His laws and profaning His holy things who put no difference between the holy and profane, neither show the difference between the clean and the unclean. (*Bp. Smalridge.*)

CHAPTER XX.

VERS. 1–48. **The men of Israel turned again upon the children of Benjamin.**—*From justice to wild revenge:*—It may be asked how, while polygamy was practised among the Israelites, the sin of Gibeah could rouse such indignation and awaken the signal vengeance of the united tribes. The answer is to be found partly in the singular and dreadful device which the indignant husband used in making the deed known. Womanhood must have been stirred to the fiercest indignation, and manhood was bound to follow. Further, there is the fact that the woman so foully murdered, though a concubine, was the concubine of a Levite. The measure of sacredness with which the Levites were invested gave to this crime, frightful enough in any view, the colour of sacrilege. There could be no blessing on the tribes if they allowed the doers or condoners of this thing to go unpunished. It is therefore not incredible, but appears simply in accordance with the instincts and customs proper to the Hebrew people, that the sin of Gibeah should provoke overwhelming indignation. There is no pretence of purity, no hypocritical anger. The feeling is sound and real. Perhaps in no other matter of a moral kind would there have been such intense and unanimous exasperation. A point of justice or of belief would not have so moved the tribes. The better self of Israel appears asserting its claim and power. And the miscreants of Gibeah representing the lower self, verily an unclean spirit, are detested and denounced on every hand. Now the people of Gibeah were not all vile. The wretches whose crime called for judgment were but the rabble of the town. And we can see that the tribes, when they gathered in indignation, were made serious by the thought that the righteous might be punished with the wicked. Not without the suffering of the entire com-

munity is a great evil to be purged from a land. It is easy to execute a murderer, to imprison a felon. But the spirit of the murderer, of the felon, is widely diffused, and that has to be cast out. In the great moral struggle the better have not only the openly vile, but all who are tainted, all who are weak in soul, loose in habit, secretly sympathetic with the vile, arrayed against them. When an assault is made on some vile custom the sardonic laugh is heard of those who find their profit and their pleasure in it. They feel their power. They know the wide sympathy with them spread secretly through the land. Once and again the feeble attempt of the good is repelled. The tide turned, and there came another danger, that which waits on ebullitions of popular feeling. A crowd roused to anger is hard to control, and the tribes having once tasted vengeance, did not cease till Benjamin was almost exterminated. Justice overshot its mark, and for one evil made another. Those who had most fiercely used the sword viewed the result with horror and amazement, for a tribe was lacking in Israel. Nor was this the end of slaughter. Next, for the sake of Benjamin the sword was drawn, and the men of Jabesh-gilead were butchered. The warning conveyed here is intensely keen. It is that men, made doubtful by the issue of their actions whether they have done wisely, may fly to the resolution to justify themselves, and may do so even at the expense of justice; that a nation may pass from the right way to the wrong, and then, having sunk to extraordinary baseness and malignity, may turn, writhing and self-condemned, to add cruelty to cruelty in the attempt to still the upbraidings of conscience. It is that men in the heat of passion which began with resentment against evil may strike at those who have not joined in their errors as well as those who truly deserve reprobation. We stand, nations and individuals, in constant danger of dreadful extremes, a kind of insanity hurrying us on when the blood is heated by strong emotion. Blindly attempting to do right, we do evil; and again, having done the evil, we blindly strive to remedy it by doing more. In times of moral darkness and chaotic social conditions, when men are guided by a few rude principles, things are done that afterwards appal themselves, and yet may become an example for future outbreaks. During the fury of their Revolution, the French people, with some watchwords of the true ring, as liberty, fraternity, turned hither and thither, now in terror, now panting after dimly-seen justice or hope, and it was always from blood to blood. We understand the juncture in ancient Israel, and realise the excitement and the rage of a self-jealous people when we read the modern tales of surging ferocity in which men appear now hounding the shouting crowd to vengeance, then shuddering on the scaffold. In private life the story has an application against wild and violent methods of self-vindication. Passing to the final expedient adopted by the chiefs of Israel to rectify their error—the rape of the women at Shiloh—we see only to how pitiful a pass moral blundering brings those who fall into it. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*)

CHAPTER XXI.

VERS. 1–25. **The men of Israel had sworn.**—*An unreasonable oath:*—1. It was an oath that flowed from rash rage rather than from real zeal. Men must swear in judgment (Jer. iv. 2), not when transported with passion, as Israel was now against Benjamin; their fiery spirits stood now in more need of a bridle than of a spur. 2. It was an uncharitable oath, as it was against the repairing of a perishing tribe, which the law of charity bound them to support, and not to see it perish out of the land through the want of their helping hand. 3. It appears unlawful, as it crossed the revealed will of God in Jacob's prophetical blessing upon this tribe (Gen. xlix. 27), and that of Moses also (Deut. xxxiii. 12), both which prophecies had been spoiled had this one of the twelve tribes been extinguished. 4. The performance of this unreasonable oath was likewise bloody and barbarous, for by virtue of their oath their blind zeal transported them to destroy many persons in all those cities of Benjamin who had no hand in that foul act of the men of Gibeah. (*C. Ness.*) **One tribe lacking.**—*One lacking:*—This inquiry represents the spirit of the whole Bible; that is all that I have to say. It is indeed not so much an inquiry as a wail, a burst of sorrow, a realised disunion, a shattered kinship. Israel was meant to be foursquare—twelve, without flaw, at every point a noble integer. Benjamin is threatened with extinction, Benjamin is not in the house of God,

Bethel, a city literally, but a sanctuary spiritually, and Benjamin is outside. Men should not take these facts with indifference. I have no faith in your indifferent piety, in your piety that can allow any man to be outside, and never ask a question about him or send a message to him. That is not Christianity. From the first Benjamin was a little one, having only some thirty or forty thousand fighting men, a figure that went for nothing in the numbering of old Israel, and over a very delicate and difficult question he came into collision with the rest of Israel. He was alone, and after an almost superhuman resistance he was overborne, all but extirpated, and he went away and hid himself some four months in the rock Rimmon, the inviolable rock of the pomegranate, and there he took account of himself. How many am I? Thousands fell and thousands more; eighteen thousand fell, all men of valour, over against Gibeah towards the sun rising, and we are now dwindled into some six hundred men, and nobody cares for us, and nobody seeks us out. Wait a moment. Perhaps at that very time all Israel was saying, "Are we all here? All but Benjamin. And why is Benjamin not here? O Lord God of Israel, why is this come to pass in Israel, that there should be to-day one tribe lacking in Israel?" But you are eleven! Yes. What of one? What of one? "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, and one of them being gone astray, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after the one that is lost, until he find it?" Thrice repeated—that is the way of the dear old Scriptures. Whenever the proper name is repeated, the repetition is the sign of concern, solicitude, anxiety. "Martha, Martha"; "Simon, Simon"; "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem"—the same pathos. "O Lord God of Israel, why is this come to pass in Israel, that there should be to-day one tribe lacking in Israel?" We see from Bethel what we never saw from the battlefield. Until you have seen the world from the house of God you have never seen it. You have never seen man till you have seen him from the Cross. Keep up the Church. That is the specular tower that is the point of vision. Until you have seen the world religiously you have not seen it, you twaddling, tinkering, niggling reformer. Now you can look at this text as a sentiment, as a discipline, as an encouragement. I. A SENTIMENT. Why? Is not this the human aspect of the solicitude of God's heart? In this respect as well as in others is man made after the image and likeness of God. In all such emotion there is a suggestion infinite in scope and tenderness, a suggestion of humility, family completeness, absolute unselfishness, redemption, forgiveness, reconstruction, everlasting joy, the gathered fractions consolidated into an everlasting integer. But you will have that lost man. And Paul, that marvellous compound of Moses and Christ, honouring the majesty of the law as he always did, yet feeling its weakness in the presence of sin, did he not tremble under the same emotion? He says, "I am in continual sorrow." Great heavens! what is the matter? It is not enough for him that the forces of the Gentiles are moving towards the Cross, that from Midian, Ephraim, and Sheba men are rising to show forth the praises of the Lord. Not enough; what more do you want? "I could wish myself accursed; anathema from Christ and my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh. My heart's desire and prayer to God is that Israel might be saved. For see how the doves are flocking to the windows! I know, I know: beautiful! Thank God for it, but"—and who is it that speaks thus?—I would know this man. "I am of the seed of Israel." What tribe? Ah, what tribe? Hush! You want music now—not the blare of the organ but the whisper of the harp. "Of the tribe of Benjamin." Why, that is the tribe that is lacking in the text. Yes. Thus history rolls round in ennobled and amplified repetition and variety—evolution unimaginable in vastness and variety. He is of the tribe of Benjamin. In Judges all Israel mourns that Benjamin was lacking. In the Romans Benjamin mourns that all Israel is away. If you have lost your tears, you have lost your Christianity. The Bible varies a good deal in historical and even moral colour, but it never varies in pity, love, and mercy. From the first God loved man with atoning and redeeming love. We want all the genius, all the poetry, all the letters; we want them and welcome them all if they will be servants in the house of God, and help us in the expression of an inexpressible pity—a contradiction in words, a harmony in experience. I challenge you—graciously and lovingly—and I think you will not find one bare place in all the area of the Book. Let us try it. In Eden there is a promise; in the wilderness there is a tabernacle—a mercy-seat. In Genesis there is "a covenant." In Malachi there is "a book of remembrance." In Exodus "the Lord keeps mercy for thousands, and forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin." In Numbers there will be nothing! Yes, in Numbers "the

Lord is long-suffering and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression." Why, what more could He do on Calvary? And that in Numbers, which you thought a bare place. In Judges, "the Lord is grieved for the memory of Israel." In Samuel, when the avenging angel had gone forth He recalled the angel, and "let the lifted thunder drop." But Chronicles—they will be all details, annals, and a field for the higher critics rather to pull to pieces. There will be nothing, I think, in the Chronicles. Will there not? In the Chronicles, God says, "If His people will seek His face and turn away from their wicked ways, He will hear them from heaven. He will forgive their sins. He will heal their land." And as for the Psalms. What need we say of them, or of Isaiah, or Jeremiah, or Ezekiel? They are golden with the love of God. In Hosea God heals the backsliding of His people, and loves them freely. Even James, a man without poetry, a church without a spire, wrote his letter to the twelve tribes—twelve. They were scattered abroad—but no scattering can kill the household of faith. Now is it possible for any tribe to be lacking, to become extinct? Where, for example, is the tribe of Dan? It disappeared beyond record in the 1st Chronicles, and is not named in the Apocalypse, but its few thousand members amalgamated with some other tribe, say, with this very tribe of Benjamin. Yet even in the Apocalypse the number of the tribes is twelve, twelve foundations, and twelve gates of twelve pearls. And we may be absentees, but God's house shall be filled. Now that is the text as a sentiment. A great moan, a most tender, passionate, evangelistic feeling. II. THIS HIGH FEELING HAS ALSO A DISCIPLINARY ASPECT, and therefore there is a whole field of complete and ardent loyalty. When Deborah sang her triumphant song she disclosed the sterner aspect of this case. She mentioned the absentees by name, and consigned them to the withered immortality of oblivion. "Why should there?" said that mother heart, "why should there have been one tribe lacking on that day of the battle? Why?" "Reuben remained among the sheepfolds" and listened to the bleatings of his flock when he ought to have answered the call of the trumpet, and helped to repulse the nine hundred chariots of Sisera. "The Lord will have hold of him yet." Why was he lacking on that day? Oh, he was preoccupied; he sent promises, but he remained at home among the flocks when he ought to have been serving with the army. And some are criticising the sermon who ought to be out saving sinners. Oh, these prior engagements, these domestic excuses, these parliament and council and other engagements that prevent our being at the war. And Gilead abode beyond Jordan, and Dan was concealed in ships, and Asher peered from behind the creeks and wondered how the war was going on. Is it not so with you? Do not hinder your fellow-soldiers if you cannot help them. Any fool can do mischief. Stupidity can sneer at enthusiasm, and we may remain away from the battle. Do you think that is going to interfere with the success of these great evangelistic movements and missionary movements? There is another variety, oh, very singular indeed! There is a lacking, or an absence, which affects great indignation because it has not been sent for. Do you know nothing about that? You do! They stand back for a space, that they may see whether they will be missed. You have heard of these men? They say, "We are just waiting to see whether a circular will be sent to us. One has been sent next door, and we are simply waiting to see." You are not! You are grieving the Spirit of God. Now, there was a band in old Israel who tried this trick in three instances, but I think the third was the last. Once Gideon overthrew the Midianites, and held in his one hand the head of Prince Oreb and in his other hand the head of Prince Zeeb. The Ephraimites chided him severely because they were not sent for—they would have been very glad to have held somebody's dead head in their hands. It was the trick of Ephraim. They tried it once upon the son of the harlot of Gilead. Ephraim said to Jephthah, "When thou passedst over to fight against the children of Ammon, why didst thou not call on us to go with thee?" One can be fully valorous the day after the fight, and when all is dead and gone they say, "Why were not we sent for?" And Jephthah was a bold and plain-spoken man—base-born, but he could not help that—but the Spirit of the Lord was in him, and the wrath of the Divine fire burned in his bones, and he said I will tell you. "Ephraim, hear me; I did once send for you, and you did not come. You did not come, and now that you are trying this stale trick upon others I will put an end to you, at least to a considerable extent," and that day he choked the passages of the Jordan with the carcases of forty-two thousand Ephraimites. So there are two kinds of lacking—a lacking that excites pity and emotion and compassion, and a lacking that excites indignation. Find opportunities. Be on

the alert for chances. Watch; thou knowest not when the enemy may come, or the Lord. Be faithful. Remember that Christianity is a battlefield as well as a contemplation and doctrine. Is the whole fighting strength of the Church on the field? Are any enjoying delights of civilisation who ought to be taking part in the war? III. Now, we are looking at it as a discipline, BUT WE MAY LOOK AT IT NEXT AND FINALLY AS AN ENCOURAGEMENT. Some are no longer in the battle, yet they are not lacking in the sense of the text. They are not here—they are here. Even the mighty David waxed faint. He was but seventy when he died. When I say "but seventy" do I not speak carelessly? What a seventy! When he tottered under his weakness in one of his closing battles he nearly fell. In one of his closing battles there was a Philistine who had a sword and was pressing the king most heavily, and it was going badly with King David. The Philistine was hard upon him; hard upon him who slew the lion and the bear and the giant of Gath; hard upon him who made Jerusalem rich with the golden shields of Hadad; and the royal captains rushed to falling David and got around him and said, "Thou shalt go out with us no more to the battle, that they quench not the light of Israel," and they stood up as iron might stand, and to the foe they said, "God save the king," and to David they said—they whispered—"You shall not go with us any more to the battle, that they quench not the light of Israel." Henceforth he was to be lacking, yet not lacking. My dear old septuagenarian or octogenarian, or whatever your age may be, no more to the battle. We would not say that to the enemy; but you shall go out to no more wars; you shall still be with us; you shall pray for us and help us in the Council Chamber, and give us the benefit of your rich experience; but no more to the battle. No, my old friends, we still have you, you are with us as reminiscences, examples, memories, inspirations. "I look round my table," says one and says another; "my boys are not with me as they used to be. I miss them. They used to go with me to the village chapel, but they are lacking now. O Lord God of Israel, why is my son lacking? He is taken up with a language I do not understand. I was trained very simply, believingly, in the great redeeming truths of the gospel, but he talks to me now in a language I cannot understand, and he no more sings the old hymns and goes to the dear old house of prayer." Lacking! Have you brought no word for me this morning? Yes, I have a word for you. He may return. He is going through a very difficult process now; you know your son is a very prosperous man, and prosperity takes a good deal of chastening in order to remain pious. But he may return. I will tell you how he may return. He will have a little child, and she will be the delight of his heart, and when she is about five or six she will sicken, and in the deep dark night she will say to him, "Father, give me one long, long kiss," and she will pass away; and he will look round for some of his books. They will have nothing to say to him, and he will alight upon an old, old book, and he will read, "And Jesus called unto Him a little child"; and he will read, "Suffer little children to come unto Me"; and in secret and in darkness he will drop on his knees at the bedside, and angels will say, "Behold he prayeth." Adversity will do what prosperity cannot do. Loss will be gain. So he may return. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Every man did that which was right in his own eyes.—*Confusion and misery through want of orders:*—A visitor was once standing at a friend's door. He knocked, and knocked; but there was nobody to open. Perhaps no one was at home? Oh, yes; there was a noise within, which plainly showed that more than one or two or three were there. Again he knocked, and waited; then at last a servant came. "She was very sorry, but she had been with the children who were all quarrelling." This, then, explained the noise. Sounds of crying and anger were now heard from a room upstairs, while a little fellow ran forward to welcome the visitor. "Why, what's the matter?" "Oh, sir, father and mother are both out, and it is so miserable!" "How so?" "Why, we are all left to do as we like; there is nobody to manage us!" This was strange, was it not? Doing "as they liked" seemed to bring nothing but disorder and misery until father came home again! Now, I do not know whether those parents were wise and careful or not, or whether they could have done better with their family than to leave it so. But I know that at one time the people of God, dwelling in the promised land, were left by Him very much as those children were left. This was perhaps partly a punishment for their wilfulness and sin. They had thought they could manage for themselves very well, and now God let them try. Then there was wisdom and kindness, too, in thus showing them that they needed the care and power of a wiser, mightier One than they. (*S. G. Green, D.D.*)

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF RUTH.

THE DATE OF THE BOOK.—The story is placed "in the days when the judges ruled" (chap. i. 1), about a century before the time of David; but on its own showing it was not written till long after the events it describes (chap. iv. 7). How long afterwards is a question on which critics are not agreed; most of them consider it to be exilic (Ewald) or post-exilic (Bertheau, Wellhausen, Kuenen), mainly on the linguistic and genealogical evidence; but Driver (Introduction to O.T., 1891) thinks that the general beauty and purity of the style, which stand on a level with the best parts of Samuel, point rather to a date, which he does not seek to fix more definitely, before the exile. That the book was not received into the canon till a very long time after the captivity is shown by its place in the original Hebrew, where it occurs as one of the Hagiographa or "writings," standing second among the five Megilloth or Festal Rolls, between Canticles and Lamentations, a position which proves that it did not become canonical till after the series of "former prophets," extending from Joshua to 2 Kings, had been finally closed. In the LXX., however, which gives it the place it claims in the historical order, it comes between Judges and Samuel, and the same order is observed in the Vulgate and in the English A.V. That Josephus also must have reckoned it as an appendix to Judges is shown by his enumeration of the books of the O.T. as numbering only 22. (*Chambers's Encyclopædia.*) More than one reason may be found for supposing the book to have been written in Solomon's time, probably the latter part of his reign, when law and ordinances had multiplied and were being enforced in endless detail by a central authority; when the manners of the nations around—Chaldea, Egypt, Phœnicia—were overbearing the primitive ways of Israel; when luxury was growing, societies dividing into classes, and a proud imperialism giving its colour to habit and religion. If we place the book at this period, we can understand the moral purpose of the writer and the importance of his work. He would teach people to maintain the spirit of Israel's past, the brotherliness, the fidelity in every relation that were to have been all along a distinction of Hebrew life because inseparably connected with the obedience of Jehovah. The splendid temple on Moriah was now the centre of a great priestly system, and from temple and palace the national, and to a great extent the personal, life of all Israelites was largely influenced, not in every respect for good. The quiet suggestion is here made that the artificiality and the pomp of the kingdom did not compare well with that old time when the affairs of an ancestress of the splendid monarch were settled by a gathering at a village gate. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*) The tone of the book throughout is liberal and tolerant to the Gentiles; and part of its design—unconsciously to its author perhaps, but not the less intentional with God—seems to be to prepare for the time when through the promised Messiah the middle wall of partition between the Jews and other nations should be broken down. Now the reign of David appears to have been the only portion of Jewish history during

which such a spirit towards the Gentiles was shown without any breach of loyalty to Jehovah. This fact, taken in connection with the personal relation of David to the heroine of the story, seems to make it probable that the book was written some time during David's reign, and we know that the royal psalmist had contemporaries who, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, might have produced such a work. Indeed, there is much in the simple pathos of the parable of the ewe lamb to remind us of the idyllic beauty of the Book of Ruth, and both might well enough have come from the prophet Nathan. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

THE PLACE OF THE BOOK IN THE BIBLE.—The walls of the great palace at Versailles are covered with paintings of battles. The Bastille, Jena, Austerlitz, the Pyramids! Agony, passion, and death! Heroism and victory! One grows weary with the endless profusion of art. He sits down at last on the casement of a little window. He looks out. Here, too, is a picture. Peaceful France, with its green grass, its forests and fields, and its church tower beyond the placid lake. The Book of Ruth is such a little window amidst the historical pictures, the battle pieces of Israel. Through this window we see the home life which the pictures have hidden—godliness, unselfishness, love and peace. Is it not well for us to turn from the historic, the heroic, and, through some rift, take a swift, sweet glimpse of the pastoral and domestic scenes of life? We read of Sisera's murder and Jephthah's vow and Samson's revenge, and we think ill of Israel. Ruth gives us another view and a truer view. It is not for books and newspapers to publish what is ordinary and commonplace. They publish the remarkable, the wonderful. The very fact that a matter is publishable is fair evidence that it is exceptional. Let us remember this. Let us remember that little Ruth is the rule, and not the exception. Thus, we will think better of Israel and of all the world. (*R. S. Barrett.*)

OBJECT AND CONTENTS OF THE BOOK.—These four things seem the object of the Book of Ruth: to present a supplement by way of contrast to the Book of Judges; to show the true spirit of Israel; to exhibit once more the mysterious connection between Israel and the Gentiles, whereby the latter, at the most critical periods of Israel's history, seem most unexpectedly called in to take a leading part; and to trace the genealogy of David. Specially perhaps the latter two. For, as one has beautifully remarked, if, as regards its contents, the Book of Ruth stands on the threshold of the history of David, yet, as regards its spirit, it stands, like the Psalms, at the threshold of the gospel. Not merely on account of the genealogy of Christ, which leads up to David and Boaz, but on account of the spirit which the teaching of David breathes, do we love to remember that Israel's great king sprang from the union of Boaz and Ruth, which is symbolical of that between Israel and the Gentile world. (*A. Edersheim, D.D.*) It is a supplement to the Book of Judges, and an introduction to that of Samuel. Neither of these give an account of David's ancestors; this omission our story supplies. Ruth was that glorious king's great-grandmother. Now, unless we had known this, and also that Boaz was of the house of Judah, it would have been impossible to verify the prophecy that Christ the Messiah should descend from the royal tribe. This is one prominent purpose—to announce David's ancestry, and consequently to prove that the Saviour was "a lion of the tribe of Judah." And what an attractive picture of those ancestors it is! What uprightness and singleness of heart, what piety and modesty and purity of life are found to characterise them! Though it was not accounted a flattering distinction, but quite the reverse, to have heathen progenitors, yet if any character could effectively destroy this deeply-rooted prejudice, then that of the gentle and loving Ruth must do it. (*Wm. Braden.*) Does it not tell us that not only on the city and the palace, and on the cathedral and the college, on the assemblies of statesmen, and on the studies of scholars, but upon the meadow and the corn-field, the farm-house and the cottage, is written by the everlasting finger of God, "Holiness unto the Lord"? That all is blessed in His sight? That the lowly dwellers in villages, the simple tillers of the ground, can be as godly and as pious as virtuous and as high-minded, as those who have nought to do but to serve G in the offices of religion? Is it not an honour and a comfort, to such as us, find one whole book of the Holy Bible occupied by the simplest story of the fortunes of a yeoman's family in a lonely village among the hill of Judah? (*Canon Kingsley.*)

THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR.

RUTH.

CHAPTER I.

Ver. 1. In the days when the judges ruled.—*The transition from Judges to Ruth*:—Leaving the Book of Judges and opening the story of Ruth, we pass from vehement out-door life, from tempest and trouble, into quiet domestic scenes. After an exhibition of the greater movements of a people we are brought, as it were, to a cottage interior in the soft light of an autumn evening, to obscure lives passing through the cycles of loss and comfort, affection and sorrow. We have seen the ebb and flow of a nation's fidelity and fortune; a few leaders appearing clearly on the stage, and behind them a multitude indefinite, indiscriminate, the thousands who form the ranks of battle and die on the field, who sway together from Jehovah to Baal, and back to Jehovah again. What the Hebrews were at home, how they lived in the villages of Judah or on the slopes of Tabor, the narrative has not paused to speak of with detail. Now there is leisure after the strife, and the historian can describe old customs and family events, can show us the toiling flockmaster, the busy reapers, the women with their cares and uncertainties, the love and labour of simple life. Thunderclouds of sin and judgment have rolled over the scene; but they have cleared away, and we see human nature in examples that become familiar to us, no longer in weird shadow or vivid lightning flash, but as we commonly know it, homely, erring, enduring, imperfect, not unblest. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*) **There was a famine in the land.**—*Famine, the consequence of sin*:—This might happen many ways: by the incursion of foreign enemies, by civil wars among themselves, or by restraint of seasonable showers from heaven. Howsoever it came, sin was the cause thereof: a toleration of idolaters and public monuments of idolatry (Judg. i. 21, 27, 29, 30, and iii. 5, and ii. 2), contrary to God's express commandment by the hand of Moses. They fell themselves unto idolatry (ii. 11, 12, 13, 17, and viii. 27). I. That sins, especially those aforenamed, deserve the judgments of God (Deut. xxviii.; 1 Kings viii. 35–37). Therefore, to escape plagues, let us take heed of sin (Ezek. xviii. 31; Rev. xviii.). II. That famine and dearth is a punishment for sin, and that a great plague (Ezek. v. 16; Deut. xxviii. 23, 24; Lev. xxvi. 19, 29; Amos iv.). And when this hand of God cometh upon us, let us search our ways and humble ourselves (2 Chron. vii. 14), that the Lord may heal our land, for it is a terrible judgment (1 Sam. xxiv. 14) and without mercy (2 Kings vi. 10, 29; Ezek. iv. 10). III. We may hereby see how God made His Word good upon them, and that He dallieth not with His people, in denouncing judgments against them; for Moses had told them (Deut. xxviii.) that God would thus afflict them if rebellious against Him: and here the story telleth us that in the days of the Judges this famine came. (*R. Bernard.*) *A famine in the land!*—in the land of promise and in Bethlehem, the House of Bread! No doubt the state of affairs at Bethlehem constituted a severe trial of faith to Elimelech and his family and neighbours. It is very hard to see the meal growing less and less in the barrel; it is even harder for those who have enjoyed times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, and seasons of genuine delight in His service, to lose the experience of the Divine love and care, to find prayer becoming a burden and the Word of God

lifeless and unhelpful; but can either the one condition of things or the other be any excuse or justification for forsaking the land of promise? For, to begin with, how can a change of front help us under the circumstances? If corn be scarce in Canaan, where God has pledged Himself to feed us, is it likely that better things will be found in a land upon which, as we shall see, His curse is resting? If from any cause our sense of the presence and approval of Jesus seems to have lost something of its distinctness, even in that circle of Church life and Christian society with which we have been associated, is it probable that we shall obtain truer solace and renewal in that "world" the friendship of which is declared to be enmity to our Lord? And, after all, what is the province of faith if it be of no service to us under such circumstances as these? Christ, as we well know, changes not; if there be a change in our experience of Him, the causes lie with us, and not with our Lord—the clouds are earth-born; what we need is more sun, not less, and this we shall never obtain by turning our back upon Him from whom every blessing of spiritual experience, as well as of earthly enjoyment, flows. It is pretty certain that, like Elimelech, those whose hearts are growing colder would protest almost with indignation that they have no intention of any permanent abandonment of Christ. They are suffering from famine—from a loss of spiritual enjoyment. To what may this unhappy state of things be due? Some, perhaps, would frankly aver that they never have found enjoyment in Christ and His service from the very commencement; they have sought to serve Him purely as a matter of duty: for their pleasure they have looked to the world. Some, again, would admit that there are both food and enjoyment in the Divine life for those who desire to follow Christ, and at one time they themselves hoped that it would prove permanently satisfying; but they confess that they got tired of it after a time, and it seemed rather hard to them that they should be required to limit themselves to that which, however good in itself, appeared to be somewhat restricted in character. Now, our Bread is Christ, and dissatisfaction with our Bread is dissatisfaction with Him, and confessions such as those to which we have been listening simply mean that the Lord Jesus has ceased to be, or more probably has never been in any very real sense, everything to us; such persons as those whose cases we have imagined have not actually given up serving and loving the Lord, or at any rate do not think they have done so, but into a heart which has never been completely surrendered to the Master they have admitted other objects of regard, and these later affections, competing with that earlier one, have dimmed its lustre and loosened its hold upon us. And are there not others who, whilst desiring after a fashion to lead a Christian life, deliberately place themselves beyond the reach, so to speak, of the nourishing and fructifying grace of God by the very character of the circumstances by which they elect to surround themselves? Their friends, their amusements, their books (not to mention other matters) seem to be chosen almost with a view to hindering instead of assisting their growth in Christ. But the Holy Spirit is Sovereign; He is the Lord of life as well as the giver of it, and He feeds the souls who seek Him in accordance with His own will, not in accordance with theirs. And the famine in Bethlehem took place "in the days when the judges ruled." It is impossible to read the historian's account of those days (Judg. ii. 11, &c.) without realising that the times were very bad indeed, and just such as we should expect to be characterised by famine and distress of all kinds. For, to begin with, they were days of religion by fits and starts—days in which the Israelites served God when they were in trouble and forgot Him as soon as their circumstances improved. Is it likely that such a condition of things and such a fashion of living can succeed? Will God bless those who, blind to His long-suffering, set every law of gratitude and right behaviour at defiance in this hopeless kind of way? But is not this precisely what some of us are constantly doing? No, religion by fits and starts cannot possibly be a happy state of affairs: it must involve us in that separation from God which results in famine. We shall not improve our circumstances, however, by turning our backs upon God; let us understand that our want is due to our own conduct, not to God's unfaithfulness, and let us seek so to amend our lives that He may yet be able to make our land flow with milk and honey. Moreover, the days when the judges ruled were obviously days of intermittent government: the arrangement was but a makeshift at the best. In our own case it is the absence of the autocratic rule of the Lord Jesus, or rather our fretful murmuring against the rule, which lies at the root of most of our spiritual sorrow. We acknowledge the Lord as our Saviour, but do we sufficiently recognise Him to be Christ our King? It is

impossible for us to fear the Lord and serve our own gods, and be happy—try as we may. That there are times in the experience of all Christian people when the pasture which once was green fails somewhat of its peaceful restfulness no one who knows anything of life will for a moment deny. But this is neither starvation nor a breaking of faith on the part of our covenant God. Elimelech left Bethlehem in a moment of panic, or a fit of despondency or of world-hunger, but others remained and trusted the God of their fathers; and when ten years later Naomi, the solitary survivor of the little band, returned, she found her friends alive and well and in the enjoyment of barley harvest. They had been tried, indeed, but never forsaken. It was sad enough that Elimelech should have left the land of promise and the House of Bread: it was worse that he should have selected Moab as his new home. It was not merely that the people of the country were heathen, and that, as Elimelech must have known, if he and his family were to remain true to God they would have to lead lives of trial and to face unpopularity and perhaps persecution, but Moab had acted with extraordinary bitterness to his ancestors in times past, and in consequence was under a very terrible curse. Are we in no danger? Are there none of us who are beginning to turn our heads, and our hearts too, in the direction of those old associations and those old surroundings which did us so much injury in the past—the scars of whose wounds, the fascination of whose attractions, have not yet passed away? Are we wise in venturing where stronger men than we are have fallen, where we ourselves fell not so long ago? God help us, and keep us true to Him and to ourselves! (*H. A. Hall, B.D.*) **Bethlehem-judah.**—*The famine in Bethlehem:*—The home of Elimelech was in Bethlehem—"Bethlehem-judah" as the historian is careful to remark, in order to distinguish it from another Bethlehem in the territory of the tribe of Zebulun. Its very name—Bethlehem, *i.e.*, House of Bread—indicates its fertility. And therefore the famine which drove Elimelech from Bethlehem must have been extraordinarily protracted and severe; even the most wealthy and fertile parts of the land must have been consumed by drought: there was no bread even in the very House of Bread. Elimelech and his household were by no means likely to be the first to feel the pinch of want, or to feel it most keenly; for he came of a good stock, of a family that stood high in the tribe of Judah, and was a man of consideration and wealth. The probability is that he was rich in flocks and herds, a sheep-master such as Bethlehem has constantly produced, and that it was to find pastures for his famishing flocks that he went to sojourn in Moab. (*S. Cox, D.D.*) **He, and his wife, and his two sons.**—*Family names:*—The names are thoroughly Jewish, and are rich in meaning. Elimelech was a grand name for a pious man; it means, "My God is King." The mother is called Naomi, "the gracious" or "sweetness." Mahlon means "weakly," and Chilion, "pining" or "wasting," referring probably to their bodily condition; for as they both died young it is possible they were ailing from their birth. But it is noteworthy that in those olden times parents were accustomed to give their children names according to some peculiarity in their circumstances, or in the fond hope that the special virtue implied in the name might be developed in after-life. Isaac's firstborn is Esau, because of the redness of his skin. Moses in exile calls his son Gershom, "For," he said, "I have been a stranger in a strange land." The custom is dying out in these modern times. Parents give children names without inquiring the meaning; the sound is more to them than the sense. But there may be more involved, for good or evil, in the old custom than we suppose. Shakespeare asks, "What's in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet." True, but as an American writer points out, "The influence of names in the formation of character is probably much greater than is usually imagined, and deserves the special attention of parents in their bestowment. Children should be taught that the circumstances of their bearing the names of good men or women who have lived before them constitutes an obligation upon them to imitate or perpetuate their virtues." It does not follow that the desired result will be obtained, yet it may be an influence; and at least the name, when contrasted with the life, will be a constant rebuke. (*Wm. Braden.*)

Ver. 2. They came into the country of Moab, and continued there.—*Lessons from the conduct of Elimelech and Naomi:*—1. Learn from the change in the circumstances of Naomi's husband not to trust in the uncertain possessions of this world. You may now be wealthy and respectable among your neighbours and acquaintances; a few years or months may reduce you to a condition of discomfor .

if not of poverty and indigence. 2. Learn from the consequences of the step taken by Elimelech, the peril of discontentedness and impatience under adverse circumstances. Should riches make themselves wings, and poverty threaten to be your lot, beware of rashly changing your habits and connections. 3. Ye that are parents, surrounded with a family of children, learn from this history to reflect how soon those children may be taken away. And oh! strive and pray, above all things, that they may be the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. 4. Learn from Naomi's trials the beneficial effects of affliction; and from her resolution to return to her native land—the land of Jehovah's worship—that the only true refuge in affliction is pure and undefiled religion. (*H. Hughes, B.D.*) *The wanderers:*—Thus the history of Ruth begins with a story of wanderers from God. It is a sad, but not a strange commencement. I. WHY DID THEY WANDER, AND THUS LEAVE THE HOME OF THEIR FATHERS? The answer given is, "There was a famine in the land." God had sent upon them a temporary trouble, and they fled from it. But when God chastens us in His wisdom, our duty is to yield with contentment and submission. We should bear the rod and Him who hath appointed it. When we patiently yield to His merciful chastisements, they become our most precious blessings. "There was a famine in the land," and they fled from it. Temporary sufferings made their home for a little while uncomfortable, and they could not patiently endure the will of God. It was their own land. It was their father's land. It was the Lord's land. Their family and friends were there. Why should they fly? The next season might be better, and more than repay them for the losses of the present. The famine might follow them to the land whither they went, and make their sufferings greater there than at home. When Socrates was urged by his friends to escape from the prison where he was condemned to die, he answered them, "Tell me of a land where men do not die, and I will escape to that." How much better might this family have found a quiet submission to the will of God! What an illustration this is of sinful, foolish man! Adam had all the garden of Eden. One single restraint made him a voluntary wanderer from God. How easily have all who have descended from him rebelled and wandered since! But can we ever find happiness in running away from God? Is there any happiness but in a cheerful, filial submission to God? See where this wandering from God begins—in a spirit of rebellion and discontent. Oh, be ye watchful there. Be ready to hear and to do the will of God. In the midst of your trials remember His mercies. II. BUT WHO WERE THESE WANDERERS WHOSE STORY WE HAVE BEFORE US? They were a family of Israelites, of professed believers in the Word of God. Never does sin seem to be more dreadful than when man's ingratitude is contrasted with God's mercies. You are never straitened in God. You have all things and abound in Him. He is rich in His mercy to you all. Why should you wander? III. THIS WANDERING WAS WHOLLY UNNECESSARY. These Israelites were not poor and perishing. They "went out full." Their wandering was therefore wilful, and this made it the more rebellious and guilty. But is not all wandering from God unnecessary? Why need we ever go astray from Him? It will be always a solemn charge against us, "they went out full." It is the wandering which makes us empty. If we go away from God our own heedlessness or choice is the fountain of our guilt and sorrow. Why need we wander? IV. FROM WHENCE DID THESE ISRAELITES WANDER? It was from the Lord's own land, Immanuel's land. It was from the whole company of His people. It was from the midst of the privileges of Divine revelation. It was from Bethlehem, the House of Bread. It was a hasty, foolish wandering from a happy home. We will not call every journey a wandering. It depends upon whence we came and whither we go, and under whose direction we move. Jonah wandered. When God sent him to Nineveh he fled to Tarshish. And God arrested him in the deep and brought him back. Manasseh wandered. And he was taken in the thorns and bound with fetters, till, in the day of his affliction, he sought the Lord and was forgiven. Demas wandered. From a love of this present world he forsook his Master and returned no more. Judas wandered. And how fearful was his end when he went to his own place! This is the wandering of which we have to speak. It is a wandering from God, from His Spirit, from His Word, from His Church. Whosoever goes astray from God voluntarily leaves the salvation which has been provided for him, and makes it his condemnation that he has loved darkness rather than light, because his ways are evil. But there are many wanderers from God in a very peculiar sense. They go from the very midst of His family, from Bethlehem itself, where Jesus is. They were born in His Church. They were

early dedicated to Him in His holy sacrament. They were taught His Word, and named and registered among the number of His covenant people. They might have lived always at His feet and in His favour. But they left Bethlehem in rebellious discontent. V. WHITHER DID THESE ISRAELITES WANDER? "To the country of Moab"; to a land of idolatry; a land of open licentiousness and crime. What a change of condition to them! What though bread was abundant there! "Fulness of bread like that in Sodom!" Man does not live by bread alone. And who that truly loved God would not rather live with a famine in Bethlehem than with sinful abundance in Moab? They went to Moab, but only "to sojourn there." Just as Lot went to sojourn in Sodom. Just as every wanderer from God goes into the world. It is but for recreation. It is only a harmless indulgence. It is but for a season of enjoyment. They mean some time to return and never to go back to Moab again. To die in Moab, without God and without hope! Nothing is further from their thoughts than this. They will only dip in the lake, like the swallow, and they shall feel refreshed for a longer flight. Ah, how little they know of the dangers they encounter! VI. AND WHAT WERE THE RESULTS OF THEIR WANDERING? What could they be but wasting sorrow and death? Ah, how sad are the results of a life of guilt! How mournful are the consequences of a wandering from God! (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *Spiritual advantages sacrificed to worldly gain:*—Were they wise in taking this step? For some reasons they were wise. There was an abundance in the land of Moab, and a scarcity in the land of Judah. Worldly prudence, then, seemed to point out some other spot as their dwelling-place. But one thing they did not sufficiently consider—they were leaving behind them many of their religious advantages. Yes, there is no doubt that Elimelech was wrong, very wrong, in leaving the land of Judah with his family, and settling in the godless country of Moab. It is a fearful thing to set little store by our religious advantages and blessings, when God has given them to us. When, for instance, a person chooses a new home, how apt he is to reckon how far he will be a gainer in a worldly point of view, putting aside altogether his gain or loss in spiritual things! How sad, if he should grow richer for this life, but poorer for eternity! Again, when a servant chooses a fresh situation, is he not apt to measure the goodness of it by the wages he is to receive, instead of thinking seriously how far his soul is likely to prosper in his new home? (*Bp. Oxenden.*) *Cowardly emigration:*—Emigration from one's own land can only be justified when it becomes an inevitable thing—where the population abounds more than the means of maintenance, and the people require to be thinned by the emigration of some for the comfort and advantage of all. But when people leave their country in the day of its difficulties, and thus refuse their help, they play the part of cowards who desert the army when the tide of battle rolls against its standards—they act undutifully before God, unworthily as patriots, and cruelly as human beings. Our best exertions at such a crisis are always due; and instead of flinching from a sphere in which any good is possible to us, we ought to show that duty calls us wherever we can be of service. (*J. Cumming, D.D.*) *The godly oppressed, while the wicked have abundance:*—This may seem a strange thing, that the godly should be oppressed with famine, when worldlings and heathen wallow in their wealth. Of these David speaketh (Psa. xvii. 14, xxxvi. 15, lxxiii. 4, 12). The like you may hear in Job (xxi. 7). But of the righteous it is said that they often cry out of their afflictions, their sorrows and nakedness, their hunger and misery; yea, our Saviour Christ pronounces Himself in His members, poor, hungry, naked. Judge now between the outward estate of the godly and the wicked; are they not contrary? That which of the world is condemned is of the Lord commended. Yet be not terrified from godliness, but rather strengthened in your profession. Then will you say, "Tell us the cause of this inequality?" Our Saviour answers (John xv. 19, xvi. 20). He compares us to the fruitful vine, which doth not only abide frost, snow, storm, and heat, but also at the gathering time is broken off, that the grapes may be reached. The gold must be tried in the furnace, the silver fined in the fire, the wheat purged in the floor, and, before it be meat for man, must also be ground in the mill; so must we be proved in affliction, fined in persecution, and crushed in pieces, under the burden of our own miseries, that we may be made prepared bread for the Lord's own spending. Why, then, doth the Lord make such large promises to His Church of plenty, seeing it endures continual poverty? I answer, the Church of God must be considered after two sorts: the first, as it is cleansed in the blood of Christ, and washed pure from all outward and notorious offences, unto which estate pertain all these outward promises of liberality in the Scriptures. The second

is the declined estate, or corrupted condition of every one in the Church, even unto the world's end: unto this pertain all the punishments and tribulations which the godly endure, which the Lord sends upon them that He may by little and little scour us from our transgressions and weary us with the miseries of this life, that we may the more earnestly desire the life to come, for the Lord doth here scourge us that we should not be condemned with the world. (*E. Topsell.*) *Moab doomed:*—Moab was a doomed country. More than a hundred years before Ruth's birth its sentence had been pronounced through the mouth of the prophet Balaam: "There shall come a Star out of Jacob; and a Sceptre shall arise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab." "The earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up." (*C. F. Hall.*) *Elimelech an exile:*—In the "Field of Moab," that is the upland canton bounded by the Amon on the north, the mountains on the east, and the Dead Sea precipices on the west, people lived very much as they did about Bethlehem, only more safely and in greater comfort. But the worship was of Chemosh, and Elimelech must soon have discovered how great a difference that made in thought and social custom and in the feeling of men toward himself and his family. The rites of the god of Moab included festivals in which humanity was disgraced. Standing apart from these he must have found his prosperity hindered, for Chemosh was lord in everything. An alien who had come for his own advantage, yet refused the national customs, would be scorned at least, if not persecuted. Life in Moab became an exile, the Bethlehemites saw that hardship in their own land would have been as easy to endure as the disdain of the heathen and constant temptation to vile conformity. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*)

Ver. 3. **Elimelech, Naomi's husband died.**—*The death of Elimelech:*—He went first from Israel, the land of the living, and led them thence, and so he now goeth out of the world before them. I. DEATH IS THE END OF ALL, AND IT SPARETH NONE (Josh. xxiii. 14; Job xxi. 33; Eccles. vi. 6, vii. 2; 1 Cor. xv. 51; Heb. ix. 27). II. A FULL SUPPLY OF BODILY WANTS CANNOT PREVENT DEATH. The man must die in Moab, where was food enough; the rich glutton must die also, and the rich man with his barn full. III. WHERE MEN THINK TO PRESERVE LIFE, THERE THEY MAY LOSE IT, as Elimelech doth here, fleeing from the famine in Israel, yet died where plenty was, in Moab; for no place is free from death, and when the time appointed is come, man cannot pass it (Job xiv. 5). (*R. Bernard.*) *Elimelech's departure and death:*—I. THE CAUSE OF HIS DEPARTURE. "There was a famine in the land." Famine cometh from God. It was threatened in the Mosaic law, as a punishment from Heaven for disobedience and sin (Lev. xxvi. 18–20). See how many arrows Jehovah hath in His quiver! In how many ways He can wither our comforts—blast our enjoyments. See how dependent we are upon Him. If famine and its calamitous consequences be occasioned by sin, let us be thankful to God that they are not inflicted upon us. We cannot deny that our sins are great and numerous, considering the precious advantages we enjoy. Still God loadeth us daily with His benefits. "He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." Let us learn to be thankful. Let us flee to the Redeemer's Cross for pardon, on account of our past forgetfulness of God. If famine and its accompanying horrors were experienced so frequently in the land of promise, we may gather that we cannot be free from adversities in any station or in any portion of the earth. When we are encompassed by difficulties—when we are ready to wish that we were in the situation of some of our neighbours, did we but know how bitter the ingredients which the hand of Providence not unfrequently puts into their cups, we should murmur less at our own crosses, and endure with a more satisfied mind our own tribulations. Let us learn, then, to be satisfied with the station which Providence has assigned us, and seek for relief under the trials which are inseparable from it, in the holy Word of God. Religion is the only effectual soother of human woe. It does not, indeed, remove miseries from those who are under its hallowing dominion, but it mixes the sweet with the bitter, so as to render the burden supportable. By directing the eye of the troubled Christian to that heavenly Benefactor who was suspended for him on the Cross, and thereby opened for him a way to the realms of unending blessedness, it deprives the trials of this temporary scene of much of their bitterness, and imparts new energy to the sinking soul. Again, if the sore effects of famine were felt in Canaan, while there was abundance in Moab—if Israelites suffered want, when Egyptians, and Philistines, and Moabites suffered it not—the possession of many earthly comforts is no evidence of spiritual safety, no sure sign of Divine favour and love. The only heaven which the despisers of the Saviour

shall enjoy lies on this side the tomb; therefore they often receive more of the blessings of Providence than the heirs of glory. II. WHITHER ELIMELECH DIRECTED HIS COURSE when he departed from Canaan. By this conduct this man evinced too great a regard for terrestrial bliss, and too little for that which is heavenly. He slighted Divine ordinances and the privileges of the Lord's sanctuary. The grace of God has, indeed, enabled His servants to keep their garments clean in the midst of the greatest pollutions, as Joseph in Egypt and Obadiah in the household of wicked Ahab; still it is oftener the case, under such circumstances, that the Christian suffers more of evil than he imparts of good. "The companion of fools shall be destroyed." "Lead us not into temptation." If intercourse with the ungodly be so replete with danger, let us carefully avoid it. III. WHAT BECAME OF ELIMELECH IN HIS NEW DWELLING-PLACE? "And Elimelech Naomi's husband died, and she was left, and her two sons." We are not informed how soon he died; but that he finished his life shortly after his settlement there is clear from his death happening before that of his two sons, who lived only ten years after their arrival in Moab. How short the period he escaped from the pressure of famine in the land of his nativity! And if he had greater abundance of earthly comforts in his new habitation, how quickly were they all taken from him! If he had remained in the land of religious advantages, he would not have had to sustain adversities and hardships there long. Rather than resort to unlawful, or even questionable, measures, to get rid of our troubles, we ought to implore aid from heaven, that we may "endure" the "chastening" of the Lord—that we may bear the afflictions which His providence allots to us with patience and humility—being fully persuaded that our heavenly Parent doeth all things well—and likewise with earnest supplications for the accompanying influences of the Divine Spirit, by which they become greatly instrumental in meetening our souls for the habitations of the blessed. Learn: 1. That adversities and troubles should not be allowed to weigh too heavily on our minds. 2. That we should be very moderate in our estimation of, and desire for, earthly blessings. (*John Hughes.*) *Out of one sorrow into another*:—The end of one sorrow is the beginning of another, like the drops of rain distilling from the top of a house, when one is gone another follows; like a ship upon the sea, being on the top of one wave, is presently cast down to the foot of another; like the seed which being spread by the sower is haunted by the fowls, being green and past their reach is endangered by frost and snow, being past the winter's hurt, by beasts in summer, being ripe is cut with the sickle, threshed with the flail, purged in the floor, ground in the mill, baked in the oven, chewed in the teeth, and consumed in the stomach. This made David say (Psa. xxxiv. 13). But be not discouraged, for through many afflictions must we enter into the kingdom of heaven, and by affliction we are made like the Son of God. (*E. Topsell.*) **She was left, and her two sons.**—*Comfort in bereavement*:—I. THAT ALBEIT DEATH IS DUE TO ALL, YET IT SEIZETH NOT UPON ALL AT ONCE; BUT ONE DIETH NOW AND ANOTHER HEREAFTER. But God will have mankind upon earth till the last day; He forbeareth some, and reprieveth them for their amendment; for the lengthening of life is for our further repentance. II. THAT THE LORD, IN AFFLICTING HIS CHILDREN, SWEETENETH THE SAME WITH SOME COMFORTS. He wholly leaveth not them without some taste of His mercy and goodness, as we may see in His dealing with Naomi. He took away her husband, and left her two sons, and after took them away, but gave her an excellent daughter-in-law. If we look upon the affliction, let us also consider what cause of comfort we have; mark when, for what, how long or short, what it is allayed with, that we be not wholly cast down. (*R. Bernard.*)

Ver. 4. **They took them wives of the women of Moab.**—*Sinful marriages*:—The sin of these young men in marrying strange women is not expressly denounced as a sin in the story, although it is denounced in the Targum, which commences verse 4 thus: "They transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and took foreign wives from among the daughters of Moab." But no one can read the Old Testament without feeling that they sinned against the law, for to the Hebrews marriage was a religious covenant; and St. Paul does but utter an admitted and familiar truth when he asks, "What fellowship has light with darkness, or Belial with God?" The reason of the law is given in the passage just cited from Deuteronomy—"they will turn away thy children from Me, and they will serve false gods." The daughters of Moab were specially obnoxious to the faithful Israelites. They appear to have been among the most fascinating, and the most wanton and profligate, women of antiquity. Their gods—Chemosh, Moloch, Baal-peor—were incarnations of lust and cruelty. They demanded human sacrifices. Children were cast into

their burning arms. In their ritual sensuality was accounted piety. True, Mahlon and Chilion were exceptionally fortunate in their wives. They were not turned to the service of false gods, though there was grave reason to fear that they might be; but, on the other hand, neither did they turn their wives to the service of the only true God. It was not till after her husband's death that Ruth learned to take shelter under the wings of the Lord God of Israel (chap. ii. 12); and Orpah, as we are expressly told (chap. i. 15), "went back to her people and her gods." (*S. Cox, D.D.*) *In the country of Moab*:—It is wonderful how soon and how easily one gets used to a change of circumstances when the change itself is brought about gradually. The country of Moab, into which Elimelech and his family had journeyed, had of course its own language, its own fashions, and its own religion too, and these were as dissimilar as possible from those of the country which they had just now left. Yet the new-comers were in no serious sense shocked by what they saw and heard—had they so been they would have retraced their steps without delay; but each day brought its own novelty, and they managed to accustom themselves to the new things of to-day before it became necessary to face those of the morrow. Looking calmly at our fashion of living and way of acting now, some of us are compelled to admit how much we have changed in recent years; we never guessed that the alteration was so great or so complete; we never meant to have come so far. Worst of all, we never thought we should have felt the change so little. We remember well the qualms of conscience by which we were troubled when first we commenced to wander: we recollect now how the protests of our heart became fainter and fainter day by day until they ceased to be anything more than a hardly audible whisper. We went to sojourn in the country of Moab: we came into the country of Moab, and continued there. To begin with, our intentions were purely selfish, as selfish as were those of Lot when he elected to pitch his tent toward Sodom. We were going to get what we could out of Moab; they who lived there had something that we coveted, and we determined to make them share it with us. And, moreover, we had no serious intention of giving Moab anything in return. It is, indeed, just possible that at one time we may have possessed the Quixotic idea of remodelling life in Moab to suit our own ideas, but if so we soon abandoned the idea; for on the one hand we found that Moab was not willing to be remodelled—indeed, when we faintly suggested something of the kind, they said to us, as Sodom had said to Lot, and with not a little point, "Stand back; this one came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge"; and on the other hand, our own opinions were neither sufficiently clear in our own minds nor dear to our own hearts to enable us to graft them upon others. We were somewhat surprised, it may be, and a little pained, at the way in which our new neighbours received our well-meant attempts, in the early days of our life in Moab, to bring before them the advantages of a life of obedience and surrender to God. "If Bethlehem was such a charming place, and the life there so delightful, why did you exchange it for our country?" they not unnaturally inquired; "if Bethlehem did not satisfy you, how can you suppose that it will satisfy us?" Nor may we forget that in leaving the land of promise the wanderer never intends to be absent for other than a short period. If, on parting from our true home, any one had suggested that we should have been found in Moab to-day, we should have denied the imputation with indignation. Yet here we are still; and here in His great mercy the Good Shepherd has found us, and hence He desires to carry us home again—to our home and His. So they came into the country of Moab, and appear to have been received there with courtesy and hospitality. The world is always glad when those who have been making a somewhat definite profession of devotion to God show signs of a desire to relax the strictness of their behaviour; it is always willing to meet such persons more than half-way, and to do its best to enable them to quiet the still struggling conscience with as little delay as possible. If the world would only persecute us when it finds us on its own ground, there would be some hope that our stay in Moab would prove short indeed. Not that the world is any more prompted by unselfishness in its reception of us than were we ourselves in our journey to Moab; our new friends rejoice that, by our change of front, another protest against their way of life has died a natural death, and they are only too glad to be present and assist at its obsequies; they are, moreover, clear-sighted enough to see without being told that our surrender is a tacit victory for the world and indifferentism, and *pro tanto* a defeat for the gospel and a discredit to the life of faith in Christ. (*H. A. Hall, B.D.*) *Alternation of shadow and sunshine in life*:—And thus the world moves on—deaths and marriages, marriages and

deaths. The household which to-day mourns as though all joy had taken flight for ever to-morrow resounds with the laughter of many voices at a new-born happiness. The faces all tear-stained yesterday are bright with smiles to-day. The bell which slowly tolled the funeral knell an hour ago now rings out the joyous wedding chime. So it must be, so it ought to be. Probably life would lose half its beauty but for this alternation of shadow and sunshine; at least, this we know, that human hearts need both the darkness and the light, or they will not grow to that perfection of truth and purity which God has designed they shall attain. Elimelech died, the sons married. It is a simple statement, yet a whole world of change is involved in it for that small household. (*W. Braden.*)

Ver. 5. **Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them.**—*Bereavement a blessing:*—What a melancholy collapse it all had been! For those so dear to her, death; for herself, solitude—the woman was left of her two sons and her husband. And yet what a marvellous blessing bereavement not only may be but often is. Surrounded by those who make up to us our world, we are slow to raise our eyes above or beyond them, or to realise that we have any need which they are incapable of supplying; but when they are taken from us, these beloved ones upon whom alone we have leaned and to whom alone we have been in the habit of looking for strength and consolation and advice, then it sometimes is that the soul looks up as she hears the Master calling her by name, and through her tears recognises for the first time the patient Lord who has ever been her truest friend. God would not have us love our dear ones one whit the less, but He would have us learn to put Him first and to trust Him implicitly about them no less than about ourselves. (*H. A. Hall, B.D.*) *Enormous trials*:—Observe—1. That many afflictions do attend the most gracious souls (Psa. xxxiv. 19). 2. Crosses seldom come single upon God's servants. 3. God did wonderfully support her in all these her great trials, and left her upon Scripture record as a pattern of patience unto all succeeding generations. (*C. Ness.*)

Ver. 6. **She arose . . . that she might return.**—*Homeward longings*:—Observe—1. God's house of worldly correction is to God's people a school of heavenly instruction. Naomi's crosses and losses she met with in Moab made her soul to sit loose from that cursed country, and to long for Canaan—that blessed land of promise. God's rod hath a voice (Mic. vi. 9), and now Naomi's ear was open to hear the instruction of it (Job xxxvi. 8–10; Mic. ii. 10). It is a rich mercy when affliction brings us from worse to better, from Moab to Canaan, further off from sin and nearer to God. 2. Godly souls should lead convincing lives. Such and so amiable was the conversation of godly Naomi in the eyes of those two daughters of Moab that it convinced them both—to love her and her people, and to go along with her out of their own native country unto her land. Plato saith, "If moral virtue could be beheld with mortal eyes, it would attract all hearts to be enamoured with it." How much more, then, would theological virtue or supernatural grace do so? 3. Every heart should hanker heavenward, as Naomi did homeward from Moab to Canaan. (*Ibid.*) *A woman of character*:—I. SHE RETAINED HER RELIGION—HER ALLEGIANCE TO THE ONE TRUE AND LIVING GOD—IN THE MIDST OF SURROUNDING IDOLATRY. II. SHE BELIEVED IN GOD EVEN IN THE MIDST OF ADVERSITY. III. SHE EXERCISED AN INFLUENCE FOR GOOD ON OTHERS. 1. On those who had known her intimately—her own household. 2. On those who had known her long—long enough to find out her true character. 3. On those who, according to all experience, are least easily influenced by one in her position—on her daughters-in-law. IV. SHE COULD DENY HERSELF FOR THE GOOD OF OTHERS. 1. It would have been an advantage to her to have these two strong, active young women with her to work for her in her old age. But a settlement would be easier for them in their own land than in Judah. So she bade them return, and was willing to go home alone. 2. She rose, too, above that petty jealousy which might have been excused in one so circumstanced, and wished them that provision which was the best security for rest and honour for a woman: "rest each of them in the house of her husband." Naomi's religion was no mere surface thing. It had become a part of herself. It had informed her character. It saved her from the corruptions of idolatry, from despair, and it enabled her to exercise a beneficent power over those who knew her best. What imperfect religion could do for her the sublime faith of Christ can do for all. (*Joseph Ogle.*) *The awakening*:—To trace the course of the wanderer away from God is sad and painful. The result of misery and regret is always the same; whether he ever return

to God or not his sorrow over the remembrance of his wandering will be equally sure. We must never hesitate, therefore, in proclaiming to all the wanderers from God, "You will find no rest in Moab." But I am not now to trace this course of sin to its dreadful result. There is for some a day of awakening in the present life. And, painful as this day may be, it is still a happy day. It is the beginning of a new life, a happy life, a life of glory. It is the dawning of a light which is prepared as the morning. It is the blessed visitation of the grace and goodness of God to the lost and guilty. We must never forget that this awakening of the soul is the work of God. Idolatry and enmity to God reign throughout the land of Moab. There Naomi dwells. There, if God permitted, Naomi would die. There, if God did not arrest and arouse him, the sinner would perish. To leave him in prosperity in this condition is to leave him to hopeless destruction. God speaks unto him in his prosperity, and he says, "I will not hear." This is his manner from his youth. Then God sends awakening providences. Afflictions and losses are multiplied. The nest is broken up. The soul is made sorrowful. Thus it was with Naomi. Her husband died. Her two sons are taken away. How many of His children have been saved by the bitter remedy of affliction, and have thus been taught to bless the chastenings of the Lord! But why should you make affliction necessary to your soul's salvation? Let the goodness of the Lord lead you to repentance. Let His love awaken your gratitude. But whether affliction or joy be made the instrument to awaken the soul, it is equally a Divine instrument. Welcome it, do not resist it, but cultivate it as a priceless gift. Now God means to bless you indeed. Listen to His voice with gladness. In this day of awakening, Naomi found that she had gained nothing by her wandering from God. There had been a famine in Judah. But ah, she had found a far worse famine in Moab. There every comfort had failed and every hope had departed. In no single point was her condition improved by her flight from Israel. But was this peculiar to her? Can you ever gain in such a course? Are you ever the happier for transgression, or made the more contented by forgetting your Creator? Far enough from all this is your actual experience. Your awakened mind looks back upon life, to say, with distress, "I have sinned, and what hath it profited me?" There is not a single real pleasure, or joy, or gain in life, of which any man can truly say, "This, at least, is the reward of my sin." Even if you never truly repent, your retrospect of life will be just as unsatisfying and destitute of comfort to your soul. You will despise all that you have gained. You will despise yourself for pursuing vanities so madly. And nothing will remain to you as the result but the most overwhelming despair. How much you have lost! You have thrown away the favour of God. You have sacrificed your peace of conscience. You have lost your early readiness to receive religious impressions. But good news from the Lord's land comes to this awakened wanderer. "Naomi heard in the country of Moab how that the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread." What precious intelligence does the gospel bring to the guilty! It declares the pardoning love of God. It proclaims complete atonement in the blood of Jesus. It announces full salvation in His merits and death. It exhibits God reconciled to those who have rebelled against Him. The message comes to you. Receive it. Rejoice in it. It is a message from God to each of you. Then the awakened wanderer sets out at once on a return. Naomi "arose, that she might return from the country of Moab; wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, on the way to return into the land of Judah." Yes—the very first thing, when your mind is awakened, and you see and feel your guilt, is to go back. Many think they must first feel much, and mourn much, and suffer much, before they can hope to go back in peace to God. But why? Will your suffering save you? Will your multiplied tears add anything to a Saviour's worth? Is your dwelling on fire? And must you wait until you are scorched with the flames before you can escape in safety? Have you mistaken your road in journeying? And can you recover your lost steps the better by delay or hesitation or fruitless grief? Nay. You want all the time for actual pursuit. You have none to waste. Turn! turn! fly! fly! 'Tis madness to defer. Naomi goes to no other part of Moab, to no other land of idolatry. She goes directly back to the land of Judah. This is a blessed example. How many go from one broken cistern to another! But all these efforts are vain. Edom or Babylon are no better than Moab. No. You must fly to Bethlehem at once. Now is the accepted time. This is the day of your salvation. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) **How that the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread.**—*God's dealings with His people:*—I. GOD SEETH HIS PEOPLE IN ADVERSITY AND WANT, AND COMETH IN HIS DUE TIME TO HELP THEM (Exod. iii. 7, 8),

which is from His mere mercy and the stability of His love and promise to His people. II. GOD HATH EVER HAD MORE SPECIALLY A PEOPLE OF HIS OWN CALLED "HIS PEOPLE." This should make us to examine ourselves how we be God's people, whether according to creation or after the work of regeneration. III. CORPORAL FOOD AND THE NECESSARIES OF THIS LIFE ARE GOD'S GIFT (Lev. xxvi. 4, 5; Deut. xi. 14, 15; Hos. ii. 8, 9; Joel ii. 19). (*R. Bernard.*) *Good news from the far country*:—I. GOD WILL CERTAINLY REVIVE HIS PEOPLE WITH SOME GOOD NEWS FROM HEAVEN WHEN THEIR HEARTS ARE ALMOST DEAD WITHIN THEM UPON EARTH (Prov. xxv. 25). This cheered up her drooping spirit, that was almost dead within her by her manifold afflictions. This is one of God's methods, first to kill and then to make alive (1 Sam. ii. 6; Psa. xvi. 10, xviii. 16, xc. 3); the good news God sent concerning the weal of Zion to His people as they sat weeping by the waters of Babylon (Psa. cxxxvii. 1, 2) was a little reviving to them in their bondage (Ezra ix. 8); and when His people were humbled He then granted them some deliverance (2 Chron. xii. 7). Heaven is called a far country (Matt. xxv. 14); good news from thence brought in by the Holy Spirit. Oh, how welcome should that be to us and how unspeakably comfortable! (1 Pet. i. 8). II. GOD HATH HIS VISITING TIMES AND SEASONS IN RELATION TO HIS OWN PEOPLE. 1. Sometimes God visits their sins (Jer. xiv. 10), and then He fulfils His word of threatening evil against them. This is called God's visiting in His anger (Job xxxv. 15), but He retains not His anger for ever (Psa. lvii. 11). 2. He sometimes also visits in mercy (2 Sam. xxiv. 16). This is that visit which David begs, "Oh visit me with Thy salvation" (Psa. cvi. 4). III. GRACE AND BOUNTY FOLLOW WANT AND PENURY THROUGH DIVINE GOODNESS TO HIS PEOPLE. After a long scarcity (of ten years) God visits them with plenty. This holds true both in the temporal and spiritual famine (Amos viii. 11). (*C. Ness.*) *Naomi's undying faith and loyalty to Israel's God*:—During all those ten years of absence, Naomi had maintained in undiminished strength her attachment to the service and worship of the true God. "Among innumerable incorrupt she stood," like Abdiel in the midst of fallen angels, or like Noah in the midst of a revolted world. There must have been root and reality about her religion to make it thus evergreen and perennial. So have we sometimes seen in the Arabian desert a solitary palm fed by a fountain, and glassing its beauty and abundance in that from which it derived all its verdure and life. How many persons are there whose religion could not endure the test of an ordeal a hundred times less severe than this! It is a thing of mere outward imitation and reflection. Withdraw them from the midst of favouring external influences, and their superficial piety will speedily vanish away like the morning dew. Like the vase that has been electrotyped so as to resemble silver, a little tear and wear brings into view the inferior metal which forms its real material. Carey used to complain bitterly, in his days, that the Christianity of many who came out of England to India did not survive a sea voyage. It was all gone before they had "doubled the Cape." In like manner, the Sabbath-keeping and the church-attendance of multitudes have undergone sad decadence during a few months of residence in Berlin or Paris. And yet the degree in which our secret devotion and our Christian habits can live and flourish in the midst of unfriendly influences and when dependent on inward support alone, is the true test of the reality and strength of our religion. Naomi had nobly stood this test, and had thus proved herself to be "an Israelite indeed." (*A. Thomson, D.D.*)

Ver. 7. **Her two daughters-in-law with her.**—*The promising commencement*:—Here we have the most happy and promising commencement of a new work. We see them all set out together upon the same road and apparently for the same result. No one who saw them set out upon their journey could anticipate that they would voluntarily separate, or imagine that one was more likely than the other to reach the end proposed. We are obliged to wait until succeeding trials shall bring their real characters individually to light before we can discriminate between them. By a great variety of means God stirs up sinful men to seek after Himself. Anxious, excited, apparently earnest and sincere, they set out upon their journey back to the gracious Being whom they have so long neglected. Yes; they really set out, and appear to set out sincerely. I do not mean that such persons feel their need and danger: that they meditate sincerely upon their return to God; that they resolve they will go back. No. I mean that they actually begin their journey. The prodigal not only says, "I will arise and go to my father"; he does arise and go. The wise and foolish virgins both take their lamps and go forth to meet the bridegroom. Thus all go together "on the way to return into the land of Judah." As

far as this journey lies still within the limits of Moab, so far they may unite to go. Up to a certain point they must take the same path and travel in the same direction. Ah, how many of these young travellers have I seen! The Church delighted over them. Christian friends were encouraged by them. The brightest and most blessed hopes clustered around them. The Lord only, who knoweth the hearts of the children of men, could have told us which were the Orpahs and which were the Ruths of this hopeful company. His judgment at the last separates the precious from the vile, divides the gold from the dross, and assigns to each his own place. But we must follow our travellers in their journey, and see why and where they separate. As we thus follow them we see them meet with many trials of faith and patience on the road. Your former habits of sin are to be renounced. But, in addition to these, new habits of conduct and feeling are to be acquired. The habit of secret prayer in your closet and chamber; the habit of constant, earnest study of the Word of God; the habit of watchfulness over your easily-besetting sins; the habit of caution in your allowed indulgences; the habit of consideration and discernment in your relations and company; the habit of resistance to your inward propensities to evil; and, above all, the habit of constant remembrance of God your Saviour, and of simple, earnest faith in His presence, protection, and help; all these, if I should mention no more, are to be acquired, cultivated, and maintained. If all this could be done by single effort, it would be easy work. But that is impossible. It is a journey of successive steps, of continued progress; and you have to press forward in it with the utmost determination and the most sincere desire. But above all these habits of outward life, you have to come with the deep sense of sin, with a consciousness that you are condemned and destitute, with an entire refusal to trust in any virtue or excellence of your own, and to cast yourself in an affectionate and simple trust at your Saviour's feet. When you come to serve the Lord, you must prepare your soul for temptation. From the day you set out on your heavenly journey discouragements and difficulties will seem to multiply around you. The world will be arrayed against you. The habits, opinions, and plans of worldly people are constant obstacles in your way. The professed Christians around you are often fearful obstacles in the way. You see those who profess to follow Christ in many instances living just as gaily, as extravagantly, as indulgently, often as sinfully, as if they had made no such profession. Your own inward heart and feelings will often be very discouraging to you. There is such backwardness in prayer; such want of deep interest in the Word and service of God; so little sensible enjoyment often in your new path; such a necessity for constant warfare and constant watchfulness within yourself. If you relax a moment, you fall. Ah, these are great discouragements, great trials to your faith and patience. Nothing can endure through them but a heart that really loves Jesus more than all the world, and a spirit that willingly sacrifices itself for His service and glory. If this is your heart and spirit, then all these discouragements are instruments of new strength. Orpah may feel dispirited and weary. Ruth only loves the more, the more she is tried. To Orpah the way grows more unattractive and tedious as she goes on. To Ruth every step brings new determination and new desire to press on even to the end. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*)

Ver. 8. **The Lord deal kindly with you.**—*Naomi's prayer for her daughters-in-law:*—I. THAT IT IS A DUTY TO PRAY FOR THOSE WHICH DO EITHER US OR OURS GOOD. II. THAT AT PARTING FRIENDS ARE TO PRAY ONE FOR ANOTHER, as we may see the practice of it in Isaac (Gen. xxviii. 1, 3); Laban (Gen. xxxi. 55); Jacob (Gen. xliii. 14); and in Paul (Acts xx. 36). III. THAT THE GODLY ARE PERSUADED THAT THE LORD IS A MERCIFUL REWARDER OF THE DUTIES OF LOVE WHICH ONE DOTH TOWARDS ANOTHER (Col. iii. 24). IV. THAT CHILDREN SHOULD SO WELL DESERVE OF PARENTS, yea, though but parents-in-law, AS THEY MAY BE MOVED HEARTILY TO PRAY FOR THEM, as Naomi doth in this place. A good carriage is a duty towards all, then much more to parents; and the prayers of parents is a means to put a blessing upon their children. V. THAT GOD WILL NOT ONLY BARELY REWARD, BUT SO DEAL WITH US AS WE DEAL WITH OTHERS. (*R. Bernard.*) *The benedictions of life:*—The key-note of all I have to say is in that word "kindly." The argument is this. We can understand kindness in the sphere of the human, and rise from that to a prayer for the Divine kindness. No society in any age can be cemented together by force alone. Feudalism, for instance, in olden times, was not all terror. The baron could command his dependents in time of war, as he fed and housed and clothed them in times of peace; but, as the old

chroniclers tell us, there was often a rare hospitality, a hearty cheerfulness, a chivalrous affection in the somewhat stern relationship. I. THE LORD KNOWS BEST WHAT KINDNESS IS. The Lord deal kindly with you. Has He been kind? At times we should have been tempted to answer, No! The vine is blighted, the fig-tree withered, the locusts have spoiled the green of spring. Kindly? Yes, we shall answer one time when we stand in our lot at the end of days. For kindness is not indulgence. God's kindness to us may take forms which surprise us. At the heart of His severest judgments there is mercy, in the bitter spring there is healing water. The kindest things God has ever done for us have been, perhaps, the strangest and severest. So it was with Daniel and Jacob and Joseph and Abraham, our father. All God's ways are done in truth, and truth is always kindness. II. THE LORD KNOWS BEST WHAT OTHERS HAVE BEEN TO US. "As you have dealt with the dead and me." It is a touching little sentence. The dead. So silent now. Never to come back, for us to touch imperfectness into riper good. Gone! What a word of vacancy, and silence, and subtle mystery! Is it strange we should wish well to those who were kind to the dead? And Naomi links her own being with them still: "The dead and me." And with true hearts they never can be dissociated. Anniversaries of remembrance make our separations no more distant. They soften them. They give place for comforting remembrances: but the dead are near as ever. "The dead and me!" Who shall separate? None. Christ died, yea, rather is risen again, and He will raise us up together to the heavenly places. III. THE LORD ALONE WILL BE WITH US ALL THROUGH OUR FUTURE PILGRIMAGE. Apart from Divine power, which we have not to bless with, there is Divine presence which we all need. Christ will be with us to the end. Never will come a battle, a temptation, a solitude, a sorrow, a needful sacrifice, but the Lord will be at hand. IV. THE LORD HAS GIVEN US GUARANTEES OF HIS KINDNESS. We are not left to meditate on rain and fruitful seasons only. Not the green of spring, nor the south wind of summer, nor the gold of autumn alone proclaim His goodness. (*W. M. Statham.*) **As ye have dealt with the dead, and with me.**—*Kindness to the departed:*—Let us inquire how many things a dying godly man leaves behind him in this world. His soul is sent before him (Rev. xiv. 13). He leaveth behind him—I. His BODY, to which we must be kind, by burial and lamentation. II. His ESTATE, to which we must be kind, by careful and faithful administration. III. His CHILDREN, FRIENDS, or KINDRED, to whom we must be kind, by love and affection. IV. His FAULTS and FAILINGS, to which we must be kind, by silence and suppression. V. His MEMORY and VIRTUES, to which we must be kind, by congratulation, commemoration, and imitation. (*T. Fuller, B.D.*) *Behaviour in the light of death:*—You know not, husbands and wives, how long you may dwell together. Death may soon come, and will doubtless, sooner or later, come and tear away the one of you from the other. When that event shall take place, how will you wish to have behaved? Behave at present as you would then wish to have behaved, for then you will not be able to bring back the present time. Many great miracles have been wrought by the power of God, but it never did, nor ever will, recall the time that is past. How comfortable was it to Orpah and Ruth to hear Naomi say, "Ye have dealt kindly with the dead!" And how comfortable was the reflection to them through life that she had reason to give them this commendation! (*G. Lawson.*) *Showing kindness to the dead:*—It was much to be able to say this, when we consider how difficult the discharge of the duties of law-relationship often is, and how apt it is to be judged with suspicion and severity even when it is well done. The fact has been noticed long ago in the pages of many a Greek and Roman satirist. But Naomi was not aware, when she spoke this generous tribute, how very much their conduct had been the result of her own. She had won the confidence and veneration of their young hearts by her unselfishness, her forbearance, her charitable judgments, her holy consistency, and her discretion. We often make for ourselves the beds we are to lie upon, and we may be certain that there would be more Ruths in the world if there were more Naomis. But how blessed when it can thus be said of us, that "we have dealt kindly with the dead"! We should make it our habitual and earnest aim so to behave ourselves towards our kindred that, should we be called to stand beside their open graves, this would be the testimony of others and of our own consciences. But we must not forget that there is an important sense in which we may prove our undying love for the dead by our kindness to the living. Those two young widows expressed their affection for their departed husbands by their thoughtful attentions to Naomi. They loved her for her own sake, but they loved her doubly for their sakes. Religion, indeed, warrants us to

think of our friends beyond the grave as still living, though absent. David's nobly generous spirit rejoiced that he could still reach his departed Jonathan in lavishing respect and kindness upon Jonathan's only surviving son, Mephibosheth. And this sentiment reaches its highest possible point of sublimity, and becomes, as it were, transfigured, when we show kindness to another because he belongs to Christ. In this way we can still reach Him in His members, and anoint His blessed feet with our precious ointment and wash them with our tears. That poor sufferer whom you relieved by your benefactions and soothed by your sympathy was a disguised Christ. Even the cup of cold water given to a disciple in the name of a disciple is to be remembered by Him on another day. (*A. Thomson, D.D.*)

Ver. 9. **The Lord grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband.**—*The rest of marriage*:—1. Man's Maker is the chief maker of all men and women's marriages in the world. It is the work of God to provide an helpmeet for man, hence it is called the covenant of God (Prov. ii. 17), and therefore honourable to all (Heb. xiii. 4). Religious Naomi looks up here unto God, saying in effect, "The Lord grant you good husbands." Grace should be sought for, in the first place, in those seven qualifications of good matches and marriages: grace, race, face, arts, parts, portion, proportion. 2. A married state is a state of rest. So it is called here and chap. iii. 1. Hence marriage is called the port or haven of young people, whose affections while unmarried are continually floating and tossed to and fro like a ship upon the waters, till they come into this happy harbour. There is a natural propension in most persons towards nuptial communion, as all created beings have a natural tendency to their proper centre, and are restless out of it. (*C. Ness.*) *Rest in marriage*:—If it is to be wished that wives may find rest in the houses of their husbands, it must be the duty of husbands to do what they can to procure them rest, not only by endeavouring to provide for them what is necessary for their subsistence and comfortable accommodation, but by such a kind behaviour as will promote their satisfaction and comfort. Men and women may have affluence without rest, and rest without affluence. But let women also contribute to procure rest for themselves by frugality, by industry, by such behaviour to their husbands as will merit constant returns of kindness. (*G. Lawson.*)

Ver. 10. **Surely we will return with thee.**—*Promises and purposes*:—I. PROMISES OF SPEECH AND PURPOSES OF HEART, WHETHER TO GOD, TO HIS CHURCH, OR TO INDIVIDUALS, OUGHT TO GO HAND IN HAND. If a man's word does not express his meaning and bind him, nothing can. II. PROMISES AND PURPOSES OFTEN PROCEED FROM PASSION INSTEAD OF PRINCIPLE. III. PROMISES AND PURPOSES PROCEEDING MERELY FROM PASSION SOON FALL TO THE GROUND. "I go, sir," one said in the Gospels, and "went not." Some persons melting under the ministry of the Word as a summer brook (Job vi. 15–20). A changed heart necessary to perseverance. Saul may have religious fits, and Jehu much zeal; for want of a regenerated nature both come to nothing. (*John Macgowan.*) *Promise and purpose to be allied*:—1. Promises of speech and purposes of spirit should walk hand in hand together. None ought to promise with their mouths what they do not purpose with their hearts; this is to be fraudulent and deceitful, which is destructive to human society. God's children are all such as will not lie (Isa. lxiii. 8), to say and unsay, or to say one thing and think another, to blow hot and cold with one blast. Ye that have promised to give up yourselves to Christ, and to go with Him in ways of holiness, it must be your purpose to depart from iniquity (2 Tim. ii. 19; Rev. xiv. 4; Hos. ii. 7). 2. Promises of the mouth, yea, and purposes of the mind, do oft proceed from passion, and not from principle. So did Orpah's here; it was only a pang of passion which the discreet matron prudently distrusts, and therefore tries them both with powerful dissuasives. Thus Saul in a passion promised fairly to David (1 Sam. xxiv. 16, 17, and xxvi. 21), and David discovered all those fair promises to proceed more from sudden passion than from fixed principles; therefore did he distrust both his talk and his tears. Hereupon David gets him up into the hold, well knowing there was little hold to be taken at such passionate promises and protestations (1 Sam. xxiv. 22). Yea, and out of the land too, as not daring to trust his reconciliation in passion and strong conviction without any true conversion (1 Sam. xxvi. 25, and xxvii. 1, 2, 4), otherwise his malice had been restless and he faithless. 3. Purposes and promises that proceed from passion, and not from principle, do soon dwindle away into nothing. Thus did Orpah's (ver. 14), who said with that son in the parable (Matt. xxi. 30), "I go, sir"; yea, but when, sir? So here, it is certain we will return with thee,

was enough uncertain. It is a maxim, second thoughts are better than first, but Orpah's first were better than her second; her purposes and promises do dwindle away and vanish into smoke. (*C. Ness.*) *The failure of good impulses*:—The bright morning does not always shine into the perfect day; the sweetest spring-bud of promise does not always ripen into precious fruit. The seed that was cast on stony ground grew rapidly up, but withered in a moment. Orpah's decision was the decision of impulsive feeling, of filial affection; it was strong suddenly, it grew up in an instant, and in an instant it perished; and she resolved to forsake Ruth and Naomi, and return to her gods, her people, and her country. (*J. Cumming.*)

Vers. 11–13. **It grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me.**—*Naomi's parting address*:—This is a great aggravation of the afflictions of many parents, that their children are involved with themselves. They could bear poverty, they could bear reproach, they could bear death itself, had they none who depended on them for bread and for respectability in the world. God has the same right to rule over the fruit of our bodies as over ourselves, and to allot to them their share of the good or the bad things of this world. It is bitterest of all, when we have reason to think that our sins have provoked God to punish us in the persons of our friends, or to inflict those strokes which our friends must feel as heavily as ourselves. Let us beware of ever exposing ourselves to such heart-piercing reflections by conduct that may bring down God's displeasure upon our families. God's people may sometimes, without good reason, think that the hand of the Lord is gone forth against them, in the calamities which befall their families or friends. Our afflictions are hard enough to be borne by us, without the addition of groundless reflections against ourselves. At the same time, the error is much more common of insensibility to the Divine displeasure, when it has been really kindled by our sins, than of vexing ourselves with unjust suspicions of God's anger. There is one thing that still remains to be considered concerning this parting speech of Naomi to her daughters-in-law. Why did she dissuade them from going with her to the land of Judah, where the true God was well known, and persuade them to return to a country of abominable idolaters? We are not bound to justify all that Naomi spake or did. But, in charity to that good woman, we ought to believe that, for years past, she had been endeavouring, by her practice and her converse, to recommend to her young friends the worship of the God of Israel. If they were truly turned from the error of their ways, nothing that is here said was likely to drive them back to their own country. They might have been disgusted even with Naomi's own conduct, if she had not fairly told them what inconveniences they were to encounter in going to her land, and to her people. Our Lord very plainly told His followers what they were to expect in His service. "The foxes have holes," &c. We may, however, observe, that Christ usually administered proper antidotes against the fears which the doctrine of the Cross might excite in the minds of His hearers. It may be doubted whether Naomi, in the dejection of her spirits, did not overlook the powerful consolations which might have encouraged her young friends to follow her into the land of Israel, and would have more than compensated all the inconveniences to which they would have been exposed in a strange land. Doubtless she had often spoken of those privileges to them in former times; but as yet they had not learned their nature, and perhaps Naomi now despaired of ever being able to give them a perfect idea of it. (*G. Lawson.*)

Ver. 14. **Orpah kissed her mother-in-law; but Ruth clave unto her.**—*Orpah's defection*:—I. WORLDLY RESPECTS ARE GREAT HINDRANCES IN THE COURSE OF GODLINESS. The world keepeth from the entertaining of the truth (Matt. xxii. 5); it hindereth in the receiving of it. II. AN UNSOUND HEART MAY FOR A TIME MAKE A FAIR SHOW IN THE WAY TO CANAAN, BUT YET TURN BACK AT THE LAST, as Orpah doth here. And this is by reason, first, of certain motions of religion, which maketh them in general to approve of the same; holding this, that it is a good thing to be religious, and that none can find fault with a man for that. Further, the working of the Word, moving the heart in some sort to entertain it. And, lastly, the desire of praise and good esteem with men: these will make hollow hearts to set on a while to heavenward, but shall not be able to enter. III. SUCH AS WANT SOUNDNESS TOWARDS GOD FOR RELIGION MAY YET HAVE OTHERWISE COMMENDABLE PARTS IN THEM. For Orpah is commended for a kind wife, as well as Ruth by Naomi, and for a kind daughter-in-law (ver. 8); and she showed good humanity in going on the way with her mother-in-law, yea, a good natural affection in weeping so at parting.

(*R. Bernard.*) *Orpah; or, the mere professor*:—An onlooker not able to discover the difference between Orpah and Ruth so far. The crisis has come. Both had made professions (ver. 10). Here the difference is made apparent. I. WE LEARN THAT IT IS POSSIBLE TO GO A LONG WAY TOWARDS CHRISTIANITY AND YET NOT TO BE A CHRISTIAN. To be born, educated, and dwell in Christian households, these are great blessings, but do not constitute or make a Christian. It will not do to be almost, we must be altogether, decided for Christ. The cup that is almost sound will not hold water. The ship that is almost whole will not weather the storm. Feelings, sentiment, profession are all good if they spring from a living faith in Jesus Christ; without this they are worse than worthless. II. WE LEARN THAT IT IS POSSIBLE TO DECEIVE OURSELVES, AND TO THINK THAT ALL IS RIGHT WHEN IN TRUTH ALL IS WRONG WITH OUR SOULS. Hardly possible that Orpah played the conscious hypocrite. She meant what she did when she became a proselyte—did not deliberately act a part. Feeling and sentiment (love for her husband) blinded her eyes. Love to God, which she had thought supreme in her heart, subordinate to the love of Moab. This often so with men; they are not hypocrites, they are self-deceivers. Education, circumstances, the force of influences around them, produce an emotional religion which they mistake for vital godliness. They hear with joy like the "stony-ground hearers." III. WE LEARN THAT OUR RELIGION WILL NOT PROFIT US AT ALL UNLESS IT BE CHARACTERISED BY PERSEVERANCE TO THE END. Improvement: Is our profession a mere profession or the fruit of a living faith? Brought by circumstances to the boundary-line between life and death, have we stopped there? The Bible full of such instances. Felix trembled; Balaam prophesied; Herod heard gladly; Judas sat at the sacramental table with our Lord! Whatever we do, we must not stop short of conversion; if we do, we perish. (*Aubrey C. Price, B.A.*) *A good word for Orpah*:—The others did not greatly blame her, and we, for our part, may not reproach her. It is unnecessary to suppose that in returning to her kinsfolk and settling down to the tasks that offered in her mother's house she was guilty of despising truth and love and renouncing the best. We may reasonably imagine her henceforth bearing witness for a higher morality, and affirming the goodness of the Hebrew religion among her friends and acquaintances. Ruth goes where affection and duty lead her; but for Orpah too it may be claimed that in love and duty she goes back. She is not one who says, "Moab has done nothing for me; Moab has no claim upon me; I am free to leave my country; I am under no debt to my people." We shall not take her as a type of selfishness, worldliness, or backsliding, this Moabite woman. Let us rather believe that she knew of those at home who needed the help she could give, and that with the thought of least hazard to herself mingled one of the duty she owed to others. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*)

Ver. 15. **Thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods.**—*Backsliding*:—1. The backslidings of such as set out fair, and do begin well, is a sore temptation to young converts and proselytes. It was no less to the very disciples themselves (John vi. 66, 67). Thus it was also an occasion of stumbling unto the primitive Christians to behold the backslidings of two such forward professors as Hymenæus and Philetus had been; insomuch that the apostle saith to them, "Nevertheless the foundation" (of God's election) "standeth sure; the Lord knoweth them that are His," &c. As the multitude of sinners cannot give any patronage to the evil ways of sin, so neither can the paucity of saints put any disgrace or disparagement upon the good ways of God. 2. Some forward followers of the only true and living God may apostatise from thence to embrace the vanities of the Gentiles. 3. That love to the ways and worship of God is a sincere love which doth undergo trials and temptations, yet bears up against all: godly Ruth rides out the storm against wind and tide of both the sister's pattern and the mother's precept. (*C. Ness.*) *The painful separation*:—Nothing can be more encouraging to the Christian heart than to see the young setting out to seek the Lord. It is a beautiful exercise and exhibition of youth. Never do the morning hours appear so bright or so promising. We cannot suspect the sincerity of any, and therefore we encourage them to press forward. We have seen these youthful travellers going with Naomi out of the place where they dwelt, on the way to return unto the land of Judah. For a time they travel together happily and affectionately. There is a line which divides Moab from Judah. This is a painful but an inevitable crisis. The two sisters must separate. There is just such a line in our soul's history where a similar entire separation must take place. The awakened mind sees its own sinful

ness and need, acknowledges the darkness and emptiness of the Moab in which it has dwelt, and truly feels the importance of those blessed offers which the gospel proclaims. The Holy Spirit has taught the sinner the guiltiness and wretchedness of his past life. He knows, he sees, he feels the truth. But he does not love the truth. He does not embrace and choose it for his own, his portion for ever. If he would really do this, all would be well. His heart he cannot, will not, give to Christ. Anything else he will do. But nothing else will avail him anything. Poor Orpah! How often have I seen young travellers to eternity stopping just where you stop; hesitating just where you hesitate. Nothing more can be done for you where you are. There is Moab. You have tried that, and found it empty and unhappy. There is Judah. All its provisions and offers are before you, and brought for your acceptance. Never will you be sorry if you take your portion there. Here are Naomi and Ruth. They are journeying to the land which the Lord hath promised them. Soon they will be far from you, out of your sight. Then you will mourn over the separation which you foolishly made. You may go back to Moab, and bury yourself in its sins and follies. But you will find no peace or happiness there. Your conscience will never again allow you to rest. Orpah goes "back to her people and her gods." This is a most important fact in her history. She does not, cannot remain where they part. That is a place most unnatural and unattractive. No; she goes back, while Ruth and Naomi go forward. The separation grows wider every hour. This is a most affecting illustration. The awakened and convinced mind can never abide at the line where a Saviour is refused. There is no permanency in such a state of mind. There is no home for the soul there. You go back. It may be to self-indulgence, dissipation, and sensual delights. It may be to giddiness, frivolity, and empty, cheerless mirth. It may be to business, covetousness, and unceasing occupation. It may be to infidelity and assumed unbelief and argument. It may be to open hostility and persecution of the gospel, and those who love it. It may be to absolute and dreadful hardness of heart. But to whatever it shall be, you still go back. The worst opposers of the gospel we ever meet are those who once were almost Christians. But you say you will hereafter return to Christ. You cannot do this but by His own Spirit. And that Spirit you have driven far from you. There is a spring that returneth in creation when the winter has gone. But you have buried the sacred seed of your soul's welfare beneath a winter which knows no coming spring. You will mourn at the last, when your flesh and your body are consumed. But it will be with a worldly sorrow which worketh death, and not with a godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation. This is the fearful prospect in your return with Orpah. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *Orpah*:—I. ORPAH WAS A MOABITISH WOMAN—had been married to one of the sons of Elimelech—and was now a widow. She had been brought up amid the absurdities and impurities and superstitions of idolatry. But her connection with an Israelitish family was a great advantage to her, and ought to have been improved by her, to the benefit of her soul, and deemed a peculiar privilege and blessing. Oh, then, let us associate with those who live for another world—whose spirit and words and conduct diffuse the savour of heaven, and are calculated to keep God and eternity in our minds. II. ORPAH POSSESSED MANY NATURAL EXCELLENCES, which made her lovely and amiable, though still lacking that new heart and that devotedness to God without which no man can be saved. 1. Orpah acted well in the character of a wife. 2. Orpah conducted herself with kindness and tenderness and affection towards her mother-in-law, Naomi, also. 3. Another valuable feature, which we cannot view but with great interest, in the character of Orpah, was her intention to accompany Naomi to the land of Judah. It is well to see hopeful beginnings—to see the careless aroused, the indifferent in some degree alarmed about their sins, and paying more attention than before to the welfare of their souls. It is well to see the profane putting on the decencies of morality, and renouncing their vile habits and pursuits. It is well, we say, to see these hopeful signs. But, alas! they often disappoint our fondest hopes. III. ORPAH'S FATAL DEFICIENCY. She only began her march to Canaan—her resolution failed—she persevered not, but returned to her own land! Naomi wished not to prevent either Ruth or Orpah from accompanying her to Canaan, but from doing so for her sake. She had no earthly inducement to hold out to them. If they came, she wished them to come from religious considerations alone. If we take up the cause of God from any but spiritual motives—if we attach ourselves to the cause and people of God from earthly views, our religion is hateful in heaven. The "loaves and fishes" are to have nothing to do with our pursuit of Christ, but the attractions of

His grace—the privilege of serving Him, and a supreme desire to be His—His alone—His for ever. 1. Orpah forsook the cause of God—she returned to her people. Their maxims and their habits, after all, were more congenial with her mind. Woe awaits those who are kept from "following the Lord fully" from regard to earthly connections and associates. 2. Orpah forsook the cause of God with great reluctance. Agrippa-like, she was almost persuaded to go with her to the land of Judah, yet, though with many misgivings, she retraced her steps to her own country, and saw her no more. Now, with the view of inducing these wavering characters, who are thus daily withstanding the convictions of their own minds—who return to Moab, but with many tears—to hasten out of their present condition, we beg to say a few words concerning their danger. It is a great mercy to have our minds in the smallest degree impressed with Divine things, and awakened to the importance of the things which accompany salvation. It is a mercy to be made to feel some measure of anxiety about our never-dying souls and their everlasting welfare. It is the Holy Ghost striving with us, and bidding us to consider our peril while yet it may be avoided. With the view of urging these characters to a speedy determination to be altogether on the Lord's side, we beg to add a few remarks likewise concerning their present folly. When man neglects to follow the admonitions of his conscience, he deprives himself of all comfort. He cannot enjoy inward tranquillity in this state. There is something within him constantly telling him that his end cannot be desirable if a radical spiritual change does not take place in him. He cannot have real joy in this condition. If your religion resembles that of Orpah, give God no rest till the weight of your transgression drives you to the Saviour, and a believing view of His matchless love constrains you to devote your persons and your talents to His service and glory. (*John Hughes.*) *Orpah and Ruth*:—I. FAMILY SORROWS. 1. Want. 2. Separation. 3. Death. II. FAMILY ERRORS. 1. Preference of worldly comfort before religious privileges. 2. Formation of worldly connections. III. FAMILY ATTACHMENTS. 1. Their power. The amiableness of Naomi has so attached these idolaters to her that they are willing to forsake even their own mother. 2. Their weakness. The case of Orpah may teach us that an attachment to religious people is not religion; nor can it, of itself, produce religion in the heart. IV. FAMILY MERCIES. 1. The return of moderate prosperity. 2. Converting grace bestowed upon an idolater. (*Homilist.*) *The danger of religious indifference*:—A family perished, not long ago, by a fire in their own house. They were not consumed by the flames, but suffocated by the smoke. No blaze was visible at all, nor could any alarming sign of fire be discovered from the street, and yet death came as effectually upon them as if they had been burned to ashes. Thus is sin fatal in its consequences, few being destroyed by outrageous forms of it, flaming up with lurid glare, but multitudes perishing by the stifling smoke of indifference and spiritual slumber. (*J. H. Norton.*) *Unto her people, and unto her gods*:—When Christian set out from the City of Destruction, he too, for a short part of his journey, was attended by two companions: the first indeed, Obstinate, only went with him in order to try and bring him back to what he considered wiser courses, but the other, Pliable, was absolutely sincere in his desire to reach the Celestial City. "I intend to go along with this good man," he said, "and to cast in my lot with him"; he might have availed himself of the words of sincerely-meant devotion in which Orpah joined with Ruth, and have declared, "Surely I will return with thee unto thy people." Yet, as we know, when the pilgrims, "being heedless," fell into the Slough of Despondency, poor Pliable, his virtuous intentions notwithstanding, "gave a desperate struggle or two, and got out of the mire, on that side of the Slough which was next to his own house. So away he went, and Christian saw him no more." There are one or two particulars in which the behaviour of Orpah was not unlike that of well-meaning Pliable. To begin with, there can be no question but that she had a sincere affection and regard for Naomi, and would genuinely have liked to spend the remainder of her days in her society; but the attachment was purely personal, and in all such friendships there is a breaking point, a limit to the extent to which others are prepared to follow us. For it is only us whom they are following, and our path may lead us into circumstances more trying than they are prepared to undergo whose hearts are not buoyed up by the hope which animates our own. Another somewhat sad reflection respecting the history of Orpah springs from the fact that she actually started for the better land, and indeed went some considerable way on the journey. The thought of those fellow-travellers of ours who set out so cheerily with us and yet failed after all to persevere is one of the saddest that comes

into our memory when we review our pilgrimage. We call to mind their fervour, their enthusiasm, their kindly interest; we shall never forget how our heart sank within us when they announced their intention of turning back. And in the case of Orpah our feelings are the more regretful because we bear in mind that she was full of the best possible resolutions of going further still. "Surely," she said, no less earnestly than did Ruth herself, "Surely we will return with thee unto thy people." But, as we have already noticed, the desire in her mind was to be, as she put it, "with thee"; it was the personal element in her relation to Naomi which, however charming in itself, constituted the weakness of her position—it was on this rock that her frail vessel was wrecked at last. Further, if Orpah's decision pains us, can we remain unmoved at Orpah's tears? She is quite clear in her own mind that she can go no further; she will leave no inconsiderable portion of her heart behind her when she says farewell to Naomi; she lifted up her voice and wept; she lifted up her voice and wept again. Alas for the impotence of tears! The question for each to ask himself is not, What have I felt? but, What have I done? Orpah loved Naomi dearly, and wept bitterly at the prospect of parting from her, but returned to her people and her gods nevertheless. And here we must pause to inquire how far Naomi was to blame for the failure of Orpah. We recognise the honesty with which the older woman points out to her companions the sacrifice which they will be called upon to make if they elect to go further with her. She must have known, she evidently did know, that by turning back Orpah was losing her reversionary interest in the property of her deceased husband, yet we do not find Naomi telling her of this. Warn people by all means that life in the kingdom of heaven is the life of a servant and a soldier, but tell them too that their entry into the kingdom has made them inheritors of a possession greater and more real than anything than the world can offer, and which it would be the most fearful madness to throw away. Love had brought Orpah a long way towards the land of Judah: might not a little affectionate entreaty have brought her further still? It is important that before passing away from the story of Orpah we should try to realise what it was that she lost by turning back. And with the inheritance, redeemed as it was by Boaz, Orpah had also lost the honour—Ruth's chiefest glory in the ages yet to come—of being the ancestress of David and of the Messiah. Of all the promises to Abraham, that upon which in all probability the patriarch set the greatest store was God's pledge that in him all the nations of the world should be blessed. To be an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven is in itself a marvel of grace, the true meaning of which we shall never fully know here, but to have it in one's power to bring redemption within the reach of others, surely this is an infinitely greater marvel still. God offers us salvation as the satisfaction of the needs of our own heart; but He also offers it to us in order that we may be qualified as the possessors of it to work with Him in plucking from the burning those who are the bondsmen of Satan and of sin. What answer shall we give to Him that speaketh? (*H. A. Hall, B.D.*) *The parting-place*:—Where was it that Orpah parted from her companions? She went with them some way, possibly a great way, but at last they reached a point in the journey which was geographically, so to speak, one of decision, one beyond which no one could pass without committing herself to new things and a new life, and at this point Orpah made up her mind to return. What more likely than that this point was the river itself, which if they adopted the southern route would form the boundary between Moab and the land of Judah? The river flows still, and each pilgrim has to make up his mind whether or not he shall cross it. There, then, flows the river: shall we cross? Sometimes it seems to us to be the river of surrender. Can I give myself wholly and unreservedly to God? and can I give up, or consent to His taking from me, whatever is contrary to His will and therefore to my happiness, love it as I may? Sometimes the river is one of confession. We have travelled thus far without our life or our relation to the world being appreciably affected or altered, and God, who is infinitely tender in His dealing with the returning soul, often postpones the necessity of or the occasion for a definite confession of our allegiance to Him until we are strong enough to make it. Yet sooner or later the river has to be crossed, and the more definitely the confession is made the better it always is for the soul. And sometimes the river is that of a consistent life. "I would not shrink from throwing in my lot with that of the people of God," says many an one, "if I could only hope to lead a consistent life: I will make no profession unless I can carry it out, and I fail to see how under my circumstances that can be possible." Certainly God requires that those who follow Him shall follow

Him fully, as Caleb did, but God asks no one to lead the life of faith in his own strength or trusting to his own resources. A new life lies before you; but to enable you to live it, God offers you new strength. (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 16, 17. **Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return.**—*Ruth and Naomi:*—I. EVERY PERSON IS TESTED. Sooner or later, but certainly. The tests will vary in severity with the cases. In every case they will be conclusive, determining the genuineness of the life professed. They cannot be evaded. If one is for Christ, he will continue with Him. The test of God cannot be too severe. The true follower cannot be driven away. To the strongest appeals he replies: "Lord, to whom shall I go?" II. WHEN TESTED, AN ORPAH WILL GO BACK. Why should she leave so much for so little? Naomi was only her mother-in-law. There was her own mother standing and beckoning in the doorway of the old home. She was not only leaving home and country, she was leaving her God. With much depth of feeling, there was not depth enough to bind her heart. III. A RUTH, WHEN TESTED, GOES ON. What is the difference between her and Orpah, leading to this different conduct? 1. Her devotion to Naomi. She was less impulsive, perhaps, than her sister, but hers was a love which bore testing. The Greeks and Latins, among their fine discriminations, distinguished between the emotional love of feeling and the intelligent love of choice. Orpah's love was the former; that of Ruth was the love of choice. It grew out of careful reflection. It was a deep, undying attachment. 2. The religious foundation of her conduct. This is a trait, if not wholly wanting in her sister, too weak for any mention—a trait beside which Ruth's exceeding love is wholly secondary. Ruth had chosen her mother's God. 3. Her resolute exercise of will. She was moved by Naomi's appeals. She thought anew of what she was leaving. She heard tender voices calling her, of the living, of the dead: "Come back, come back." Her heart began to yield. When Orpah returned, she could scarcely resist the impulse to go with her. Then "she strengthened herself." She summoned her soul. She put forth a supreme exercise of will. IV. RUTH RECEIVED HER REWARD. She became an ancestress of the world's Redeemer. (*Sermons by the Monday Club.*) *Ruth's choice:*—All the elements of a true choice of God are here described. 1. It involves the surrender of a false belief. This quiet scene may be placed beside that on Carmel. Ruth's decision is mightier in its gentleness than Israel's in its terror. In manner the two are as unlike as the dawn to the earthquake; in results as the clear ray of a planet to the flash of a meteor. In essence they are the same. Our false god has no repulsive name, such as Baal or Chemosh; its real title is self, its worship sin, its wages death. It must be surrendered. 2. True choice of God involves sacrifice. To start out with Naomi meant not pleasantness, but bitterness. Ruth followed, as she thought, to loneliness, homelessness, perpetual widowhood; against the desire of those she left, without the wish of those to whom she was going; ready to work, to beg, to die if need be, for the one who stood to her as representing God. To-day, Canaan in the Church welcomes even Moab to its circle. Earthly advantages are largely on its side. But a cross seems to wait somewhere in the way, if only that sore surrender of pride and pleasure and will which prompt the soul's real refusal. 3. God sends help to a right choice. Providences both of joy and of sorrow; attractions and repulsions of heart; subtle influences of companionship; favour and famine; marriage and mourning; our life is one long plea for Him. 4. A decision is forced. Somewhere in the way comes a test. On either side example, desire, promise; we must hold to the one and forsake the other. 5. Right decision has its great rewards. What Ruth feared proved only unsuspected blessings. Losing her life, she found it. Bishop Hall exclaims: "Oh, the sure and beautiful payment of the Almighty! Who ever forsook the Moab of this world for the true Israel, and did not at length rejoice in the change?" (*Charles M. Southgate.*) *Conduct of Orpah and Ruth contrasted:*—It is the difference between feeling and principle in religion, between emotion and consecration, kissing and cleaving. I. EMOTION HAS ITS LARGE APPOINTED PLACE IN LIFE. It is the colour and fragrance of the soul's world. It gives both impulse and reward to action. Emotion has great play in religion. God appeals to it. The character of God is so presented as to excite our emotions. We tremble at His awfulness, adore His greatness. The story of Christ's life and death has power to move us beyond all else. The insensible heart is usually a selfish heart. But—II. EMOTION WILL NOT TAKE THE PLACE OF CONSECRATION. Here distinguish between sensuous and spiritual impressions. There is a peace, a rapture,

which the Spirit breathes into the believing soul, the promised manifestation of Christ to him "that hath My commandments and keepeth them." This is the reward of obedience, not its substitute; is not of nature, but of grace. No degree of feeling about religious things is religion. Natural fondness toward God, as toward parents, may be the mere delight of an emotional nature, a snare to the soul and an affront to Him. What joy to Christ that eyes which overflow for a novel or a play should moisten at the story of Calvary? There is need of searchings of heart and stings of conscience in unsuspected places. Orpah and Ruth feel alike, love alike, but part for ever at the test of following. III. THE TRUE OFFICE OF EMOTION IS TO DRAW TO CONSECRATION. Feeling is for the sake of following. The Church has still no realm of mightier influence than a consecrated home. The heaviest condemnation of many in the day of judgment will be that they resisted the influences and withstood the prayers of a godly home. IV. CHOOSING GOD IS PROVED BY CHOOSING GOD'S PEOPLE. The world estimates our relation to Christ by our relation to His followers. Yet it often seems as if men must be twice converted, first to Christ, and again to His Church. Do not let this woman's devotion shame us. She gave up, literally, all her world for God. True devotion to Christ turns to His Church with Ruth's matchless consecration. (*Ibid.*) *Ruth; or, decision for God*:—1. An impulsive religion is not always real religion; nay, is very often the reverse. Better, far better, to be quiet and undemonstrative like Ruth, and to have the root of the matter in us, than to be impulsive and demonstrative like Orpah, and in the hour of trial to fail. A straw will show in what direction the stream is flowing. Ask yourself, "How do I act in little things? Is self habitually postponed to God? And this because the Lord is my joy?" 2. The importance of (nay, the necessity for) an entire surrender of ourselves to God, if we would be Christians indeed. Let us ask ourselves, "Is it thus with me and the Saviour? Have I thus taken Christ to be mine? Do I thus cleave to Him? Is He supreme in my affections?" 3. The choice which we have been considering must be made with the full determination to abide by it, come weal or come woe, for ever. (*Aubrey C. Price, B.A.*) *Ruth's trial and decision*:—It must have been a severe trial to Ruth's constancy when she beheld her sister-in-law, who had probably been the companion of her youth and the friend of her early widowhood, turning away back to Moab and its idol-gods and leaving her alone with Naomi; for we are greatly influenced for good or for evil by sympathy and numbers. And had her steadfastness now depended on her human relations and affections alone, and had her heart not stricken down and rooted itself in something that was Divine, she would in all likelihood have returned after her sister-in-law. When one flower in a garden is pulled up, it loosens the hold of all the other flowers near it, unless they are much more deeply rooted. And Naomi's words seemed to give a voice to this temptation: "Behold, thy sister-in-law has gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister-in-law." This was like giving an increased momentum to the stroke, or feathering the arrow and driving it to its mark. But let us not misunderstand the venerable woman in her yearning interest and disguised love. There was a hidden harmony between her treatment of Ruth and the rule to deal gently with young converts as you would do with the early spring blossom or with the new-born child. But she dreaded a choice made from mere temporary impulse or secondary motives. The cable that is to connect the ship with the anchor needs to be tested in every strand or link. One weak point makes all weak, and may be the occasion of death to thousands. Suppose Ruth to go on to Bethlehem-judah, to be brought face to face with the stern realities of penury, and then to regret her choice and to steal away back to Moab, would not the most sacred interests suffer the most? Here, then, was her "valley of decision." Naomi had anticipated the maxim, "Try before you trust"; but she was equally ready to obey the other part of it, "Trust after you have tried." (*A. Thomson, D.D.*) Whither thou goest, I will go; . . . thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.—*Ruth: Mind, its purposes and powers*:—1. That private families are as much under the providence of God as the houses of kings. 2. That whilst religion does not secure from the ordinary trials of life, it does secure their being overruled for good. 3. That a devout committal of our being to God in His providence will never fail of its reward. In the text we have—I. A DELIBERATE RESOLUTION FOR THE TRUE. 1. The true in society. 2. The true in worship. II. A SOCIAL INFLUENCE FOR THE TRUE. 1. Naomi represented her country, and her people, and her God, to Ruth. 2. The representation which Naomi gave was most attractive. (1) Every man's

conduct is a reflection both of his companions and his God. (2) Heathens are able to identify our companions and our God. (3) We may give such a view of both as will draw them into our circle. III. AN INVINCIBLE ENERGY FOR THE TIME. 1. This force triumphed over all old associations. 2. This force overcame all the pleadings of Naomi. 3. This force changed her social condition and her destiny. Away with the dogma that man is the creature of circumstances! The soul is a mariner that can so pilot her barque as to make the most hostile winds waft her to the shores on which her heart is set. She is an eagle that can rise above the darkest thunder-cloud of circumstances, and bask in sunlight, whilst that cloud spends itself in wild tempests beneath her buoyant wing. (*Homilist.*) *Ruth's decision*:—I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF HER DECISION. II. THE EXTENT OF HER DECISION. It comprehends the sum of all her actions, and reaches to the utmost limit of her existence. Profession without principle is nothing. III. THE FELICITY OF HER DECISION. There is no substantial happiness apart from real religion. Application: 1. Are we Christians? Then we have each a soul to save—a God to serve. 2. Are we yet undecided? Ruth is our pattern. 3. Are we indifferent? Then we resemble Orpah, Ruth's sister-in-law. (*F. Ellaby, B.A.*) *The faithful choice*:—1. It was an humble choice. She has nothing to offer but herself. She affects not to bring anything which can make her of any worth. She pleads only for permission to be to Naomi in her future life all that affection and fidelity can make her. She has nothing else to offer. It matters not in what condition of life the child of earth was born, when the Holy Spirit brings her heart to Jesus she comes as a beggar. Parents and sisters may say she has been always the light and comfort of the household. They are ready to think she has never sinned. And yet she feels the burden of guilt, and weeps, and prays over the remembrance of her foolish, wasted life. The preciousness of the faithful saying, that Jesus came into the world to save sinners, is her only comfort. The assurance that the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost is her single encouragement and support. 2. It was an affectionate choice. Her heart is with Naomi. Her desires all reach forward to the land to which Naomi journeys, and thither, on whatever terms, she must and she will go. It is just such a choice to which the Saviour would lead you all. "My daughter, give Me thy heart," is His tender appeal to you. And our youthful, spiritual traveller freely and affectionately responds, "I give my heart to Thee; Thy face will I seek; hide not Thy face from me." Her choice is of the Saviour, because she really loves Him. Infinite attractions are gathered around Him. His service seems to her all that she can desire. 3. Ruth's choice was an entire one. There was no hesitation in her mind about the decision she should make. She manifested no remaining love for Moab, and no lingering desire to carry something of Moab with her. And it was this entire choice which made the happiness of her future course. She made the exchange, the transfer of herself, freely, completely, and without reserve. And there was nothing left to turn her back to Moab in her possible experience hereafter. When the choice of a Saviour is thus entire, how completely it opens the way for future duty! How it settles all future discussions and difficulties with a single decision! The secret of happiness in religion is just here. Making it the entire, single choice of the heart. The troubles and difficulties in the Saviour's service habitually arise from the vain attempt to serve two masters. 4. Ruth's choice was a determined choice. Lovely and gentle as she appears, and humbly and affectionately as she pleads, there was amazing dignity and firmness in her stand. Some of the most triumphant and remarkable deaths in the history of early martyrdom for Christ are of young and tender virgins who calmly and boldly endured every conceivable torture without a moment's faltering. "I am a Christian," was their gentle but firm reply to every solicitation to recant, until, worn out with suffering, they departed to be with Christ. You may never be called to the same sorrows. But you will be always summoned to the same decision. Jesus will always require from you the same unshrinking, determined choice. 5. Ruth's choice was an instant choice. She asked no time for consideration. Her mind was made up. Her decision was settled. She staggered not in unbelief, nor wavered amidst conflicting motives. Why should we ever hesitate a moment in our acceptance of the Saviour's offers? Surely when the Lord sets before us life and death, a blessing and a curse, and bids us choose for ourselves which we will have, we require no time for consideration. It has become a mere question of personal voluntary choice. This can never be settled but by our own personal decision and act. If it is to be settled, it must be finally, in a single moment of time. Why should that moment be delayed? Why should that frank and affec-

tionate choice be postponed? Make an instant choice. Say, "When Thou sayest, Seek ye My face, my heart replies, Thy face, Lord, will I seek." Why should any of you hesitate? All the arguments of truth, of interest, of duty, of happiness, are on one side. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *The noble choice*:—Five choices Ruth made, and five choices must we all make if we ever want to get to heaven. 1. In the first place, if we want to become Christians, we must, like Ruth in the text, choose the Christian's God—a loving God; a sympathetic God; a great hearted God; an all-encompassing God; a God who flings Himself on this world in a very abandonment of everlasting affection. 2. Again, if we want to be Christians, like Ruth in the text we must take the Christian's path. "Where thou goest, I will go," cried out the beautiful Moabitess to Naomi. Dangerous promise that. There were deserts to be crossed. There were jackals that came down through the wilderness. There were bandits. There was the Dead Sea. Naomi says: "Ruth, you must go back. You are too delicate to take this journey. You will give out in the first five miles. You have not the physical stamina, or the moral courage, to go with me." Ruth responds: "Mother, I am going, anyhow. If I stay in this land I will be overborne of the idolaters; if I go along with you I shall serve God. Give me that bundle. Let me carry it. I am going with you, mother, anyhow." 3. Again, if we want to become Christians, like Ruth in the text we must choose the Christian's habitation. "Where thou lodgest, will I lodge," cried Ruth to Naomi. She knew that wherever Naomi stopped, whether it were hovel or mansion, there would be a Christian home; and she wanted to be in it. 4. If we want to become Christians, like Ruth in the text we must choose Christian associations. "Thy people shall be my people!" cried out Ruth to Naomi. Oh, ye unconverted people, I know not how you can stand it down in that moping, saturnine worldly association. Come up into the sunlight of Christian society—those people for whom all things are working right now, and will work right for ever. I tell you that the sweetest japonicas grow in the Lord's garden; that the largest grapes are from the vineyards of Canaan; that the most sparkling floods break forth from the "Rock of Ages." Do not too much pity this Ruth of my text; for she is going to become joint-owner of the great harvest-fields of Boaz. 5. Once more, if we want to become Christians, we must, like Ruth in the text, choose the Christian's death and burial. She exclaimed: "Where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried." I think we all, when leaving this world, would like to be surrounded by Christian influences. You would not like to have your dying pillow surrounded by caricaturists, and punsters, and wine-bibbers. How would you like to have John Leech come with his London pictorials, and Christopher North with his loose fun, and Tom Hood with his rhyming jokes, when you are dying? No, no! What we want is radiation in the last moment. Yes; Christian people on either side the bed, and Christian people at the foot of the bed, and Christian people to close my eyes, and Christian people to carry me out, and Christian people to look after those whom I leave behind, and Christian people to remember me a little while after I am gone. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *True-heartedness and the tests of true-heartedness*:—I. I observe that the conduct of Ruth assures us that THERE IS SUCH A THING AS TRUE-HEARTEDNESS, and thus teaches a lesson of trust in humanity. It reveals certain elements in humanity that are reliable. Much heartlessness, much frivolity and sin, will a wise and good man find as he goes about in the world, much to dissipate the rosy credulousness of his youth, and to sadden his philanthropy; but, on the other hand, something of his faith will be justified, and he will learn that, after all, there are elements in human nature worthy our trust and our love. As the chemist finds some admixture in what seemed to be a simple element, so, doubtless, at the bottom of the purest heart lurks some particle of self, some ingredient of our earthly composition. And if one is disposed to turn a magnifying-glass upon this, it will appear enormous; if he beholds it through the lens of a sad or a foul experience, it will look grimy or distorted; or, if with nothing more than his naked eye he has a mind to notice only the evil that exists among men, he can see plenty of it, and it will look badly enough. But it is an equally correct theory of human nature, and a much more agreeable one, which admits the conviction of some moral loyalty, extant even in the obscurest places, and maintained under all trials. II. But, having thus vindicated human nature as to the fact of true-heartedness, let us proceed to consider ITS TESTS. By what signs or expressions may we be assured of its presence? I reply that the very words of the text, the very ideas to which Ruth referred, afford a sufficient indication of these tests. For consider what these ideas, expressed in

the language of Ruth, really are. They are the ideas of home, country, God, and the end of our mortal life. And are there any ideas more vital than these? Surely, if one cherishes any sacred and true thoughts at all, they must cluster around these things. 1. Home, that has sheltered and nourished you, that encloses your most secret life, that claims the first flow of your affections and their last throb. 2. Country, that organism which links your individual being to a public interest, that gives you a share in history, a pride in great names, an influence in world-wide issues, and, as a second home, inspires you with a more comprehensive loyalty. 3. The grave, which bounds all earthly action, and limits every earthly condition, that realm where distinctions of home and country melt away, the bed where all must lie, "the relentless crucible" in which rags and splendour alike dissolve, the gateway to a stupendous mystery. 4. And God, the Infinite Being to whom the instincts of our souls respond, to whom in our highest consciousness we aspire, the Source and the Interpretation of all existence, the Light that comprehends our darkness, the Strength that sustains our weakness, the Presence to which in our guilt and our adoration we lift our cry, the Nature in which we live and move and have our being—these are great realities; and it appears to me that the words of Ruth are so eloquent, and her devotion seems so great, because of the greatness of the things she spoke of. Indeed, does not this ground of thought and action constitute a grand distinction of our humanity? If in many points man is closely linked to the brute, is he not largely separated by his thoughts concerning these things, and by his action upon them? Ascribe to the animal such affections, such faculties, such power of reasoning, as we may and as we must, surely no one will claim for him such conceptions as man entertains concerning home and country and God and the limitations of his earthly lot. These are manifestations of human nature which project beyond the sphere of mere animal life, and indicate a larger scope of being. They are marks of immortality. Start with any one of these ideas, and see to what it leads. For instance, the relationships of home—is there not an argument for immortality in these? Or start from the idea of country, and is not the same conclusion unfolded? The duties, the achievements, the historical problems, that pertain to nationality, do not they suggest it? And he upon whose mind dawns some apprehension of the Infinite, he who feels assured that he holds communion with the Eternal Spirit, and presses forward towards that perfect excellence, never completely to attain, but always capable of larger attainment—surely in essence he must be imperishable. And the grave itself, dark and silent as it is, to such a conscious soul cannot seem the final barrier of existence, but only the suggestive portal of new achievements. If, then, these great realities, of which Ruth spoke, are associated with all that is deepest and noblest in our humanity, he who proves faithful to even one of these ideas, who holds it as a sacred conviction, and cherishes it with a pure love, has in him the core of true-heartedness, the ground of a principle, and a possibility in which we may trust. And permit me to add that these tests are personal and practical, tests by which we may try not so much the true-heartedness of others, for which we may have very little function, but by which each may try his own. A man can hardly ask himself a more practical question than this: "What are my thoughts, and what is my conduct, respecting home, country, God, and the limitations of my mortal life?" III. I remark, finally, that these four ideas are not only the tests of personal true-heartedness—they also reveal THE GREAT BOND OF OUR COMMON HUMANITY. That which is common to men abides in the hearts of men, is linked with the great facts expressed in the text. They thus indicate the natural ground of human unity. And upon these ideas it is the tendency of Christianity to develop a still nobler unity. (*E. H. Chapin, D.D.*)

A good resolution:—I. A RESOLUTION TO PURSUE THE JOURNEY TO HEAVEN. 1. It is a narrow way. 2. It sometimes proves a way of affliction. 3. It is nevertheless a very pleasant way. II. A RESOLUTION TO BE SATISFIED WITH SPIRITUAL ENTERTAINMENTS. 1. The Christian finds a sweet entertainment in communion with his God—in praising Him, which is one of the most delightful exercises of the mind; and in prayer, which is so necessary for the renewing of his spiritual strength. 2. In the Word of God he finds a delightful repast. He is made wise unto salvation. 3. In the conversation of his fellow Christians, the believer finds delightful refreshing. 4. The believer finds also times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord when he takes up his abode in the house of God. He experiences the truth of the promise, "they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." III. A RESOLUTION TO CAST IN THE LOT WITH THE PEOPLE OF GOD. Before you make

a resolution so to do, count the cost, and consider the nature of the step which you propose to take. 1. The people of God have generally been a persecuted people. 2. The people of God are an afflicted people. 3. The people of God are a holy people. 4. We have said that the people of God are a persecuted and an afflicted people, but they are nevertheless a people of the best prospects, so that they are truly wise, and consult their own best interests, who cast in their lot among them. IV. A RESOLUTION TO CHOOSE THE SERVICE OF GOD. When a sinner is truly converted from his sin he cleaves unto the Lord with purpose of heart. "Thy God shall be my God," is the resolution which he expresses to the Church of Christ; and in doing so—1. He resolves to cast away his idols. 2. He who makes this resolution receives God in Christ as his God—God in the person of the Mediator. 3. He who chooses God for his God resolves to devote himself to the active service of God. V. A RESOLUTION TO BE FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH. What is necessary to faithfulness unto death? 1. Begin aright. 2. Persevere as you begin, for Christ is not only the Door but the Way. Often repair to the fountain of His blood for peace; constantly resort to His throne of grace for spiritual strength; often sit at the feet of Jesus to learn the mysteries of the kingdom of God. To conclude—1. We admire the constancy and perseverance of Ruth. 2. We learn from this passage of Scripture that we ought to be faithful to those who are inquiring the way to Zion with their faces thitherward. 3. The inquiring and anxious sinner should persevere whatever difficulties may present themselves. If the difficulties and trials of the way were tenfold, it would still be his interest as well as his duty to endure unto the end. (*Essex Remembrancer.*) *Ruth the true-hearted:*—That strong and brave decision on the hills of her native Moab, where she resolves to cling to her aged and sorrow-stricken mother-in-law, reveals a character of no ordinary quality. There is in her what, for want of a better phrase, I must call depth of nature. Her character is rooted in a deep, rich soil of true humanity. A woman whose whole being is on the surface, who has no hidden deeps of feeling and thought and aspiration and love—a tree decked with showy blossoms, but never hung with golden fruit—is felt to be false to her true nature and Heaven-appointed mission. Ruth reveals to us a character nourished and strengthened from the unseen depths of an affluent nature which we love to associate with woman. The shallow woman exhibits no such heroism as that of Ruth. Here, too, we discover in her that most essential characteristic of a true woman—heart. She thinks and speaks and acts like one whose inspiring life-force is a heart aglow with the fires of feeling, throbbing with the pulsations of love and beneficence; and her whole outward life is but the spontaneous outflow of this full, fresh fountain within. A nature thus endowed and animated is rich in its own resources, and bestows its abundant benefactions upon all who come within its charmed sphere. The heart is the true regulator and benefactor of life. Sometimes neither art nor intellect predominates, but the throne which the heart should occupy is held by the ungracious goddess of Stoicism—a stolid form, which no prayer can move to sympathy, and from which no loving word ever proceeds. How desolate is the nature over which either of these three false powers presides! How impoverished is every life encompassed by the chilling atmosphere of such a nature! On the other hand, how enriched are all they who breathe the genial air which surrounds one with a nature like that of Ruth, in which the heart sits queen on her rightful throne, and dispenses her regal gifts to all. Hence the importance of true heart-culture in education. The neglect of this essential part of genuine culture, and the giving of exclusive attention to the intellect is one of the most perilous tendencies of this age. Such a process may produce a Lucretia Borgia in one sphere, and a George Eliot in another; but a Madame Guyon, a Mary Lyon, and an Elizabeth Fry will seldom or never come forth to bless mankind under its false reign. It is Madame De Stäel who wisely says that "life is valuable only so far as it serves for the religious education of the heart." Let us note another feature in the character of Ruth. Devoted affection like that of this young Moabitess to her aged mother-in-law deserves our highest tribute. There is an utter unselfishness in this devotion that is beautiful to contemplate. A selfish, exacting, suspicious passion, misnamed love, is the curse of its possessor; a love pure and unselfish is the perpetual joy of the heart in which it glows, and of all who feel its Divine warmth. Orpah can speak loving words; Ruth can do heroic deeds. A selfish person cannot interpret unselfish love. Two hearts must be in happy accord to read the meaning of each aright. Blessed are they who can discern and feel true goodness. Blessed are those homes where true-hearted Ruths preside and Love reigns, goddess of the happy home circle. Yes, it

is heart-power, and not any other force, that is most impressive and most enduring even in this unappreciative world. Courage pays its devotion at the shrine of suffering love; physical force surrenders to the higher power of the heart. "Alexander, Cæsar, Charlemagne, and myself founded empires; but upon what foundations did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ alone founded His empire upon love, and at this hour millions of men would die for Him." We must rear monuments in human hearts, by true love and devotion to humanity, if we would live through succeeding ages. The crowning grace of Ruth's character, as it is that of every other human being, is her piety. Love to man is crowned and glorified by love to God. (*C. H. Payne, D.D.*) *True decision:*— We have just stood at the line which separates Moab from Judah. Orpah has gone. We shall trace her course no longer. We would gladly never see her example followed by others. We must now confine ourselves to the beautiful decision and faithful choice of Ruth. She stands before us a sincere youthful convert to the Lord's service. She has decided the question for her soul by gratefully accepting the offers of a Saviour's love. She sets out upon an untried journey alone. Naomi, indeed, is with her. And her heart is affectionately bound to her mother-in-law. But Ruth has many cares, trials, and remembrances of which Naomi is not conscious. To Naomi the journey is a well-known return. To Ruth every step is untried and new. She was born in Moab. She knows nothing of Judah. Thus is it with every youthful convert. The experienced and aged Christian has much acquaintance with the way in which you go. The new-born child of grace takes every step on ground unknown and untried. This is the way in which all must go who would walk with God. "This people shall dwell alone." Each one, be the multitude ever so great, is a hidden one with God. Multitudes may be travelling in the same direction, but the feelings and experience of each are solitary. Ruth must make her decision in her own secret heart, and make it for herself alone. Her earthly friends must all be left. They are in Moab, from whence she takes now her final departure. This separation is not to be made without a trial of her faith. The more affectionate she is in her real choice, the more she will feel the separation from those whom she leaves behind. Religion cannot destroy our earthly affections, our interest in those who are dear to us in natural ties. Nay, it much increases the warmth and power of our love. This decision may often meet with much opposition from those with whom you dwell. Your dearest earthly connections may oppose. They love you. But they do not love your religion. You must follow the Lord fully though you follow Him alone among your earthly connections; and He will make those who oppose at peace with you. Be faithful to Him, and your fidelity shall be the source of increased confidence and respect, even from the worldly who appear to reject and despise you. As we trace the history of Ruth, we find her meeting with new trials of her faith and decision after she sets out alone. Orpah has gone. But still Naomi proves the spirit of Ruth. Your sister has gone back to her people and her gods. If you mean ever to go back, now is your best time to go. Remember, I have nothing to offer you. If you go with me it must be to be a partner of my griefs and wants. Thus God often proves the young disciple with new trials. He sends His east wind upon the young trees of His planting; not to weaken or destroy, but to give greater strength and endurance for the time to come. Our real conversion to Him is an hour of peace and blessedness; but it is not an end of trial. Nay, it is the very beginning of new contests; and our fidelity in the decision we have made is to be proved at once, and to be proved constantly, by new dispensations of the will of God. Be really faithful and sincere, and God will prove your faith, to strengthen, settle, and stablish you for ever. Be truly gold, and then the refiner's fire will only purify and make you bright. This faithful decision Ruth was obliged to make in the face of backsliding in others. She sees Orpah go back, yet she perseveres. When a child of the world comes out on the side of Christ, and pursues, in the midst of the evil examples of many, a course of simple, faithful devotion to the Saviour, how it honours His truth! How it strengthens His cause! How it impresses even those who oppose! How such faithfulness is owned and prospered by the Lord, to whom it is offered, in the usefulness to others of the life which is adorned by it. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *Ruth deciding for God:*—I. AFFECTION FOR THE GODLY SHOULD INFLUENCE US TO GODLINESS. Many forces combine to effect this. 1. There is the influence of companionship. 2. The influence of admiration. Let us therefore copy the saints. 3. The influence of instruction. When we learn from a teacher we are affected by him in many ways. Instruction is a kind of

formation. 4. The influence of reverence. Those who are older, wiser, and better than we are create in us a profound respect, and lead us to follow their example. 5. The influence of desire to cheer them. 6. The influence of fear of separation. It will be an awful thing to be eternally divided from the dear ones who seek our salvation. II. RESOLVES TO GODLINESS WILL BE TESTED. 1. By the poverty of the godly and their other trials. 2. By counting the cost. 3. By the drawing back of others. 4. By the duties involved in religion. Ruth must work in the fields. Some proud people will not submit to the rules of Christ's house, nor to the regulations which govern the daily lives of believers. 5. By the apparent coldness of believers. Naomi does not persuade her to keep with her, but the reverse. She was a prudent woman, and did not wish Ruth to come with her by persuasion, but by conviction. 6. By the silent sorrow of some Christians. Naomi said, "Call me not Naomi, but call me Bitterness." Persons of a sorrowful spirit there always will be; but this must not hinder us from following the Lord. III. SUCH GODLINESS MUST MAINLY LIE IN THE CHOICE OF GOD. 1. This is the believer's distinguishing possession: "Thy God shall be my God." 2. His great article of belief: "I believe in God." 3. His ruler and lawgiver: "Make me to go in the path of Thy commandments" (Psa. cxix. 38). 4. His instructor: "Teach me Thy way, O Lord" (Psa. xxviii. 2). 5. His trust and stay (see chap. ii. 12): "This God is our God for ever and ever, He will be our guide even unto death" (Psa. xlviii. 14). IV. BUT IT SHOULD INVOLVE THE CHOICE OF HIS PEOPLE: "Thy people shall be my people." They are ill spoken of by the other kingdom. Not all we could wish them to be. Not a people out of whom much is to be gained. But Jehovah is their God, and they are His people. Our eternal inheritance is part and parcel of theirs. Let us make deliberate, humble, firm, joyful, immediate choice for God and His saints; accepting their lodging in this world, and going with them whither they are going. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The influence of friends*:—It is not improbable that Ruth was in heart a Jewess, and that, for reasons which looked beyond the mere temporalities of life, she desired to cast in her lot with the descendants of Abraham. It may be that the religion which her mother-in-law brought with her into Moab had become the daughter's hope; and, discerning in it those elements of truth which were wanting in the faith of her own fathers, she naturally concluded that the people who were guided by its promises and commands would have power and blessing from above. When we add to this the fact that this woman was to be one in that line of generation through which passed the seed of the Shiloh, that the child yet to be born to her was to be the father of David's sire, we may see how direct is the conclusion that this heathen woman did, in her conduct, obey not merely the impulses of nature, but the influences of grace. It does not appear probable that God, having such a work for her to do, would leave her to herself; that He would trust to her unguided will and emotion the part which He designed her to act in His great scheme of love. The decision of Ruth, then, supplies us with this proposition: those who are striving to serve the Lord should cling to those who are the disciples of the same Master. The law of dependence, as it acts upon this world of human beings, and resolves itself into the other laws of influence and of sympathy, is found in all the relations of man. In itself it is a beautiful thing, this leaning of one upon another, this clasping of hand to hand in the great circle of human brotherhood, and feeling the electric spark as the touch of a single finger sends a thrill through the multitude. Man was born for this thing, even when he was born without sin; and that would be a high life where this law of sympathy was at work, with no power but the power of doing good. With us, however, the kindest laws of heaven have felt the disturbing force of sin; and sin has so perverted them that they act against their design, and in opposition to themselves. The influences, then, of one upon another may be for evil, as well as for good; the best intentions may be counteracted, and the best efforts frustrated, by those with whom we stand connected under the laws of social life. If we desire to serve God and be the sincere followers of our Lord we must break away from those who are serving other gods, and seek the companionship of those who serve the God of Israel. If, in times past, our associations have been with worldly persons, if we have moved in that circle of life where there is no God save the passions, and no law save the will, we must break out from this circle and enter another where life takes a higher form. We must surround ourselves with those whose thoughts and aims are upward, like our own, that thus our strivings may be aided, and our efforts sustained, by those with whom we have to do. This counsel touches some of the most delicate points in the social state. It enters into the

family circle, and draws its lines between those who have a common interest in the things which concern the body. It sweeps through all our connections, from the highest to the lowest, and demands that everywhere, and under every form, its authority be acknowledged and its injunctions obeyed. Now, of these ties of nature, some are voluntary, and others are not. Of the latter I will not now speak; while concerning the former I have something more to say. The tie of marriage is a voluntary tie, and I here confess my amazement at the readiness with which Christians yoke themselves with unbelievers. I know of few greater hindrances to a consistent walking with God than an irreligious husband or an irreligious wife. We say, and the remark is applied to religious things, that the husband can go his way, and the wife her way; but this proves, in the trial, to be about as practicable as for the parts of the body to separate and move off in opposite directions. The tie forbids this independence; and there is not a Christian wife or husband in the world who can so overcome the law which holds them as to act with entire freedom in the face of indifference or opposition. It is time for some one to tell the people that marriage is an institution of the Most High God, and that in its laws it touches the interests which are eternal as well as those which are temporal. (*S. Cooke, D.D.*) *Ruth's spiritual affinity with Naomi:*—This family feeling reigns among all the true sons of God under every dispensation. It operates with all the steadiness of an instinct. Apart altogether from Divine commands, believers exercise mutual attraction like planets that move round the same central orb. They are conscious of "the unity of the Spirit." Under the Old Testament, "they that feared the Lord spake often one to another"; under the New Testament, "they that believed were together." There is not an instance recorded in the whole inspired history of Christians preferring to live in isolation from their brethren. If there were only two believers in the same city, they would be irresistibly drawn to each other just in the degree in which they were believers. And those who are thus mutually attracted shed many mutual blessings, like flowers growing contiguous to each other in a garden that drop the dew around each other's roots. And now her God-inspired resolution strengthening and glowing as she proceeds, culminates in a solemn vow of undying constancy, in which she imprecates Heaven's righteous retribution upon herself should she fail to keep it: "The Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me." (*A. Thomson, D.D.*) *Influence:*—The Bible affirms that no man liveth to himself. Each life has an influence. What is influence? It is that subtle something which resides in our deeds, words, spirit, and character. It is a shadow of ourselves, our impersonal self. It is to us relatively what the fragrance is to the flowers, what light is to the star. We are all sensitive to influence: our hearts are open to goodness, beauty, genius. There is never a day when perhaps unconsciously we do not receive and reflect a thousand shadowy forms. Some are more receptive of influences than others, just as there are certain soils that drink in more greedily sunshine and shower; and as there are certain bodily conditions more open to disease, so there are certain mental and moral dispositions more open to good and evil, truth and error. There are men like clay—you can mould them as you will; others are like rock—you must chisel them as you can. Naomi was not perfect, but she exerted a great influence upon her daughters-in-law. I. SOME OF THE LINES ALONG WHICH HER INFLUENCE WAS TRANSMITTED. 1. There was relationship. Naomi was mother-in-law to Ruth. This link was sanctified to the salvation of Ruth. Relationship is to-day one of the most powerful aids to moral influence. See it in the Gospels: Andrew first finds his own brother Simon; Philip findeth Nathanael. Most children are open to maternal influences. Native missionaries are the best. Influence follows love. 2. There was sorrow. These women had shared a common grief: they had watched at the same bed of death; participated in the same hopes and fears. Naomi would comfort Ruth with her Jewish hope and consolation. Sorrow fits for influence. The heart is plastic. The wax is melted and receives the impress of the seal. The mind is filled for the teaching. Such opportunities for transmission of holy influence are constantly occurring. 3. There was humanity. Relationship and sorrow are accidental; humanity is the essential fact, and binds the world together. Angelic influence is impeded by difference in nature. Our hands fit into each other's palm, our faces reflect similar features. We have common wants and ways. Influence runs along the lines of our human brotherhood. II. SOME OF THE IMPEDIMENTS THAT MIGHT HAVE INTERRUPTED HER INFLUENCE. There were considerations adverse to her influence. 1. Nationality. Ruth was a Moabitess. Israel and Moab were ancient enemies. The Turk will not readily yield to the English influence. Yet so great is the power

of moral influence that it overcame this barrier. 2. Education. Ruth had grown up to womanhood before she came under the influence of Naomi; her habits were formed. She was a devout idolatress. Here was a strong impediment for moral influence to overcome. Virgin soil may be easily cultivated as we wish; not so the land long covered with weeds. When the whole man is overrun with noxious principles it is not easy to exterminate and implant new ideas and habits. This the good life of Naomi accomplished in Ruth. 3. Adverse example. Orpah went back to Moab. The good influence may fail even where its power has been felt strongly. Who can estimate the power of adverse example to-day! How many are turned by it from the ways of religion! Naomi may be counteracted by Orpah. III. THE SUCCESS OF THE GOOD INFLUENCE. The success was not absolute. Orpah returned, Ruth continued. See her wisdom. She in her turn becomes influential and useful—a help to Naomi. She becomes a permanent factor in the redemptive history. See the wisdom of yielding to high moral influences. (*E. Biscombe.*) *The power of Christian character* shining through the life of a Christian man is strikingly illustrated in the following incident: "An Afghan once spent an hour in the company of Dr. William Marsh, of England. When he heard that Dr. Marsh was dead, he said: 'His religion shall now be my religion; his God shall be my God; for I must go where he is and see his face again.'" **If ought but death part thee and me.**—*Religion a powerful bond:*—1. Such and so powerful is the bond of religion that it makes the saints of God not only desirous, but even resolute also, both to live and die together. 2. All persons and people should so live as those that do expect that they and their relations may die. So Ruth did here expect it, both for her mother and for herself. "Alas, I never thought of his death." So there be others that live so licentiously as if they should never die, never come to judgment, as if they were to have an eternity of pleasure of sin in this world (as Psa. xlix. 10–13). 3. As burial is one of the dues of the dead, so dear friends desire to be buried together. Ruth desires to be buried with her godly mother. It is very observable that the first purchase of possession mentioned in Scripture history was a place to bury in, not to build in (Gen. xxiii. 9). 4. Death is the final dissolution of all bonds of duty, whether natural, civil, or religious. The wife is no longer bound to her husband (Rom. vii. 1–4), children to parents, subjects to princes, and people to pastors. (*C. Ness.*)

Ver. 18. **When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.**—*Trust after testing:*—After proof and trial made of their fidelity we are to trust our brethren, without any further suspicion. Not to try before we trust is want of wisdom; not to trust after we have tried is want of charity. The goldsmith must purify the dross and ore from the gold, but he must be wary lest he makes waste of good metal if over-curious in too often refining. We may search and sound the sincerity of our brethren, but after good experience made of their uprightness we must take heed lest by continual sifting and proving them we offend a weak Christian. (*T. Fuller, B.D.*) *Benefit of a thorough decision:*—Those who appear half-hearted in their self-consecration expose themselves to a legion of tempters. Lingering on the border-land, they keep within the arrow-mark of Satan. Keeping in the suburbs of Sodom, they are in danger of coming within the sweep of its consuming fires. The world hopes that it shall get them back again to its ranks. They resemble persons walking in a crowd with flowing robes, which afford those who wish them evil an easy means of pulling them back and laying them in the dust. When it becomes clearly seen that our heart is fixed, the world gives us up in despair and "leaves off speaking unto us." And how that choice ennobled the young Moabitess! What pure human love! What high devotion! What sublime self-renunciation! What true wisdom introducing among the elements that should determine her choice eternity as well as time! Decision of character gives full play to a man's powers whatever they be, and makes them his own. (*A. Thomson, D.D.*) *Decision a safeguard:*—If a man is seen to be decided in his stand for Christ, antagonists will give over assailing him. There is nothing in the use of which men are more discriminating than entreaty, argument, or influence. So long as the object of their solicitude is wavering, they will bring all their batteries to bear upon him, for there is still the hope that he will yield. But when he comes openly and determinedly out for Christ, they will waste no more ammunition on him. They leave him thenceforth alone, and attack some one else. Thus decision, while it may require an effort to make it, is, after it is made, a safeguard against assault. So long as a vessel has no flag at her mast-head, the sea-robber

may think it safe to attack her; but let her hoist the flag of this nation, and that will make the assailant pause. In like manner, the hoisting over us of the banner of the Cross, being a symbol of decision, is also an assurance of protection. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

Ver. 19. **So they two went until they came to Bethlehem.**—*Constancy:*—I. THAT THEY ARE TO BE ADMITTED INTO OUR FELLOWSHIP WHOM WE FIND TO BE CONSTANT IN A GOOD COURSE, AND TRUE LOVERS OF GOODNESS, WHATSOEVER THEY WERE BEFORE. Naomi thus admits of Ruth, no doubt, with great comfort. Thus Paul alloweth of Mark (2 Tim. iv. 11), though before he had refused him (Acts xv. 38), and willeth others to entertain him (Col. iv. 10, 11). II. THAT GOD LEAVETH NOT HIS IN DISTRESS, OR ALTOGETHER COMFORTLESS. Naomi went out with husband and children, and lost them; she returneth not alone, but God sent her one to accompany her and to comfort her. III. THAT A TRUE RESOLUTION WILL SHOW ITSELF IN A FULL EXECUTION. She resolved to go with Naomi, and so she did, till she came to Bethlehem. By this may we learn to know the difference between solid resolutions and sudden flashes, raw and undigested purposes, between true resolutions and such as be made in show, but in substance prove nothing so, never seen in the effects. IV. IN THIS THEIR TRAVEL TO CANAAN, AND THEREIN TO BETHLEHEM, NOTE THREE THINGS: THEIR UNITY, FERVENCY, AND CONSTANCY. They went together lovingly, they ceased not to go on, they did not linger, they took no by-paths, neither forgat they whither they were going, till they came unto Bethlehem in Canaan. As these thus went to Canaan, so should we unto the spiritual Canaan and heavenly Bethlehem; we must go in unity (1 Cor. i. 10), and be of one heart (Acts i. 14, ii. 1, 46, and iv. 24), in a godly fervency (Rom. xii. 11; Titus ii. 14; Ezek. iii. 14), as Elijah, Nehemiah, the angel of Ephesus (Rev. ii. 1, 2), and as our Saviour, whom the zeal of God's house had eaten up. And we must go in a constant spirit, and not be weary of well-doing, for "he that continueth to the end shall be saved." (*R. Bernard.*) *True friendship:*—1. Such is the faithfulness of our heavenly Father to all His children, that He never fails nor forsakes them; but when one comfort faileth them, He findeth out another for them. The loss of one relation is made up out of God's fulness by raising up another. 2. There be but few friends that are true friends. Here be but two together. 3. Such are fast and faithful friends indeed that accompany each other to the worship of God—to Bethlehem. Many there be that do accompany each other to Bethaven, or house of wickedness, to play-houses, and places of revelling, &c. This is rather a betraying than a befriending one another. A carnal friend is but a spiritual enemy, who advised the ruin of his soul for the recovery of his body (2 Sam. xiii. 3). The truest friendship is to save and deliver a friend from the greatest evil, which is sin; but to tempt any to it, and to tolerate them in it, is not the part of a true friend, but of a real enemy. 4. 'Tis matter of astonishing admiration to hear of, and be eye-witnesses of, the great afflictions that do befall some persons, both great and good. 5. God works wonderful changes in persons, families, cities, countries and kingdoms. (*C. Ness.*) *The backslider's return:*—Naomi had wandered. But Naomi might return. God had not cast her away. He will never cast away those who truly love Him. He calls them back again to true repentance. He heals their backslidings and loves them freely. Then, like Peter, they may strengthen their brethren. They have an experience of human infirmity which they had not before. They know the dangers and temptations which surround the Christian's path. They can comfort others with the consolations wherewith they are comforted of God. But the backslider must return with total self-renunciation. Thus Naomi even renounces her right to her former name. "Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me." They said, "Is this Naomi?" "Yes, I was Naomi when I was contented and happy in the house, and among the people of God. I was Naomi when we took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in company. How foolish was I thus to wander from His holy ways! Call me not Naomi now. I have no right to that name. All was pleasant then. But the remembrance is bitterness now. Call me Mara. Let me come back as the poorest of the poor, sorrowful, and self-condemned." The backslider feels no claim to a former Christian character. He is compelled to say, "Call me not a Christian. I have forfeited that blessed name. Call me a sinner, the chief of sinners. But as such, suffer me to return again to God. 'I am no more worthy to be called a son; make me as one of Thy hired servants.'" The backslider must come back with conscious emptiness. He

has nothing to bring; nothing to offer. Naomi says, "I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty." How true is this! What can you bring back from your wanderings in Moab but the bitter remembrance of your folly? Nothing but sadness can come from a careless backsliding from God. And so far as your own acts and conduct are concerned, you must return to Him with perfect emptiness. If Divine grace and long-suffering shall receive you—if the Holy Spirit shall consent to restore you, and lead you back to the mercy-seat, once more accepted—it will be all as a free gift to the chief of sinners. Yet how precious is the expression, "The Lord hath brought me back"! Yes, though I am empty, and have nothing; though I am vile in His sight, and "mine own clothes abhor me," though I was worthy of His rejection and His wrath, yet He did not leave me in my sin, nor suffer me, unpardoned, to perish. But I come back empty. Everything has failed me except the loving-kindness and mercy of my God. No condition can be more humbling than this. Let this work of the Holy Spirit have free course in you. Do not attempt the least justification of yourselves. Speak not, think not, of any temptation that led you astray, or of the influence of any companions, or of the want of watchfulness of any friends, or of the unfaithfulness of others in instructing and warning you, or of the example and habits of others in the social circle in which you live, as the least extenuation of your own guilt. Oh, no! You have no one to blame but yourself. You have been tempted only because you were drawn away by your own lust. Yet, while the backslider himself mourns, others rejoice over him. "It came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them; and they said, Is this Naomi?" Her friends had not forgotten her. They gather around her again with delight. All Bethlehem rejoices; Naomi's poverty and wanderings are forgotten. She has herself returned, and this is enough. The poor prodigal had hardly time to say, "Father, I have sinned," before his father buries his voice in his own bosom, and lifts up a sound of joy which completely drowns the accents of the wanderer's grief. Oh, what a song of praise does his restoration awaken! Heaven and earth unite to say, over the returning wanderer, "Is this Naomi?" Is this the wanderer? This the captive that we thought was lost? This the giddy child that was bent to backsliding, and fled from all restraint? Sing, O heavens, for the Lord hath done it. Shout, ye lower parts of the earth, for the Lord hath blotted out as a thick cloud their transgressions, and as a cloud their sins! (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) **All the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi?** —*The changes wrought by time* :—Ten years ago she left, but is not forgotten. The story of her battle with poverty and consequent emigration are well remembered. But what a change! This bent form and aspect of despair tell a pitiful tale. Time and sorrow have wrought their cruel work. Ten years, and such troubles as hers leave terrible marks behind at her time of life. Wrinkles, grey hairs, and feebleness of body soon reveal themselves. Care makes men and women grow old very fast. We look twice—thrice, at the acquaintance of former years, before we believe our eyes. "Is this Naomi?" That means, where are the husband and the sons? It is no vulgar curiosity that prompts the inquiry. Women who knew Naomi well, and attended her wedding, are there; men, too, who were intimate friends of Elimelech; young men also, who as boys often played with the dead lads Mahlon and Chilion, all eagerly repeat the question to each other as they cluster round the two poor, travel-stained, weeping women. It is a bitter hour. The wounds are opened afresh. For no questions cut so keenly as those which remind us of beloved ones who have passed into the shadow of death. (*Wm. Braden.*) *The changes of life* :—I. HERE IS A RETURNING PILGRIM. Home has been but a tent life, and the curtains have been rent by sorrow and death. She tells us the old, old story. Here have we no continuing city. Bethlehem—home! Oh! that strange longing to live through the closing years in the country places where we were born! It is a common instinct. II. HERE IS A GODLY PILGRIM. Travel-worn and weary, with sandled feet, she is coming to a city sanctified by the faith of her fathers. "Is this Naomi?" If there is not so much of what the world calls beauty in her face, there is character there, experience there. The young Christian starting on his pilgrimage is cheerful enough. He goes forth full of enterprise and hope. Do not be surprised if in after-years you ask, "Is this Naomi?" How careful, how anxious, how dependent on God alone! III. HERE IS AN ANCESTRAL PILGRIM. Ancestor of whom? Turn to Matthew i. 5, and you will find in the genealogy of our Lord the name of Ruth. Do you see in the blue distance One coming from the judgment hall? Do you hear the wild cry of the mob,

"Away with Him! away with Him! Crucify Him! crucify Him"? Come near and gaze. Behold the Man! As the reapers asked, "Is this Naomi?" so we ask, "Is this Jesus?" Is this He whose sweet face lay in the manger? Is this He who passed the angels at heaven's high gate, and came to earth, saying "Lo! I come to do Thy will, O God"? Yes! Bowed, bruised, broken for us. The same Saviour, who now endures the Cross, despising the shame. Well may we wonder and adore! IV. HERE IS A PROVIDED-FOR PILGRIM. Back to Bethlehem, but how to live? how to find the roof-tree that should shelter again? She knew the Eternal's name, "Jehovah-jireh," the Lord will provide. So it ever is. Trust in the Lord and you shall never want any good thing. Believe still in your Saviour, and provided for you will be all weapons of fence, all means of consolation, all prosperity that shall not harm your soul. As the snows hide flowers even in the Alps, so beneath all our separations and sorrows there are still plants of the Lord, peace and hope, and joy and rest, in Him. Blessed indeed shall we be if we can rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him. (*W. M. Statham.*)

Ver. 20. **Call me not Naomi, call me Mara.**—*Naomi:*—I. INCIDENTS IN HER LIFE. This world is to all, in some measure, "a vale of tears." The pilgrimage of the true Christian is not through verdant plains and flowery fields, but through a "waste howling wilderness," where much toil is exercised, many troubles undergone, many perils encountered, and many severe privations endured. God is a Sovereign in the distribution of sufferings and tribulations. His own people have frequently the greatest share of troubles in this life—that their souls, which are too full of earthly attachments, may be weaned from the world. We should learn hence not to murmur nor charge God foolishly under our trials, for if we compare them with those of many of God's people who were more gracious in their dispositions and tempers than we are they will appear "light" indeed. We find this bereaved and distressed individual returning towards her native land. She acted wisely, for she was more likely to fare well in her own country—among her relatives and acquaintance, and where the knowledge and fear of God prevailed, than among strangers and idolaters in a foreign land. It would be well if we imitated Naomi in a spiritual point of view. At length we find Naomi in Canaan. When she returned her former acquaintance were greatly astonished at her appearance. Her affluence was gone, her earthly glory had faded away, and her circumstances were mean and narrow. God, however, in mercy, calmed the evening of her day. The troubles of the Christian are not only to end, but to end blessedly—even in bliss and honour! II. MORAL EXCELLENCES WHICH STOOD PROMINENTLY FORTH IN THE CONDUCT OF NAOMI UNDER THE WEIGHT OF HER TRIBULATIONS. 1. Her benevolence. Behold it delightfully displayed towards both her daughters-in-law. See how ardently she wished their prosperity, how fervently she prayed for it. Herein she, and all who are under the governance of the same superhuman principle, resemble their Divine Master. He also felt intensely for others—even when He was Himself involved in dangers. 2. Her acknowledgment of God in her troubles. See how piously she develops this feeling (chap. i. 13, 20, 21). Nothing enables a man to behave as he should in the day of adversity, nothing enables him to keep down an envious and impatient spirit, but the viewing his troubles as the allotments of Heaven, the all-wise appointments of his Father and of his God. 3. Her gratitude both to God and man. (1) Her gratitude to God. If a few handfuls of corn excited Naomi to offer to her heavenly Father a sacrifice of such fervent praise, how fervent should our praise be for abundance of spiritual food, for Christ Himself to be the strength and joy of our souls? If a little earthly food is a mercy to be acknowledged in songs of adoring praise, how much warmer should our affection be for endless and unmingled felicity for the whole man in the land of everlasting life? (2) Her gratitude to man. Inasmuch as Ruth had shown kindness to her in Moab, she showed her all possible kindness in Judah. (*John Hughes.*) **The Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.**—*Unfinished providences not to be rashly judged:*—How unfit are we to judge of an unfinished providence, and how necessary it is, if we would understand aright the reasons of God's ways, that we should wait and see the web with its many colours woven out! Three short months, during which those dark providences were suddenly to blossom into prosperity and joy, would give to that sorrowful woman another interpretation of her long exile in Moab. And one Gentile proselyte was thereby to be brought to the feet of Israel's God, who was not only to be the ancestress of Israel's illustrious line of kings, but

of that Divine Seed in whom "all the nations of the earth were to be blessed." When the night seems at the darkest we are often nearest the dawn. Begin to tune thy harp, O weeping saint and weary pilgrim! "The night is far spent, the day is at hand." Learn to wait. When the great drama of our earth's history is ended; when Christ's glorious redemption-work is seen in all its wondrous issues and ripened fruits; when order has evolved itself out of confusion, and light has come out of the bosom of darkness, and the evil passions of wicked men and the malignant devices of evil spirits have been so overruled as to work out the sovereign will of Heaven; when all the enemies of Christ have been put in subjection under His feet, and death itself has died—then shall the words spoken at the creation be repeated at the consummation of the higher work of a lost world's redemption, and God will again pronounce all to be "very good." (*A. Thomson, D.D.*) *Naomi's error:*—Naomi began to err when she ceased to believe in the wisdom and benignity of all those dark events, when she looked upon them, not as expressive of paternal discipline, but of Divine indifference and desertion, when they appeared to her distressed soul as the arrows of judgment rather than the strokes of love; like those affrighted disciples on the Galilean lake who failed to recognize Jesus in Him who was walking in such calm majesty on the tossing waves. She was also wrong in this morbid concentration of her thoughts upon her trials, and in not realizing the many blessings and comforts that yet remained to her. Elimelech and her two sons had been taken, but this lovely and devoted Ruth had been raised up. She was now poor, but she had health; and God had brought her back to those altars and courts of the Lord after which "her soul had longed, yea, even fainted." And then there were blessings which she could not lose, and which were of more value to her than a thousand worlds. Besides, how greatly did she err, as devout persons in a despondent mood are so apt to do, in measuring God's providence, as it were, by her human line, and imagining that the cloud which had hung over her like a shadow of death could not possibly be turned into the morning; just as we may imagine the people near the pole, with their many months of unbroken night, beginning at length to doubt whether the sun will ever rise again. An eloquent writer on astronomy imagines the different aspect in which our earth would appear to us could we be projected from its surface and permitted to look on it from one of the nearest planets, or from the moon. And how different would the afflictions of God's people often look could they only be projected a few years into the future, and permitted to regard them even in some of their earliest explanations and consequences. Lift up thy head, O thou bruised reed, thou too desponding woman, for lo, the winter of thine adversity is past! Cease to clothe everything in sackcloth. Take down thy long silent harp from the willows, and tune it anew for notes of loudest praise. Thou hast long exercised the duty of self-denial; it is time for thee now to exhibit the duty of delight. (*Ibid.*) *No bitterness in God's dealings:*—Naomi was not wrong in tracing all her changes in condition to God, but she erred in ascribing any bitterness to God in His treatment of her. The father loves the child as really when he administers the disagreeable medicine which is to recover him from disease as when he is dandling him upon his knees. The only difference is in the manner in which the love is shown, and that is accounted for by the differences in the circumstances of the child. In like manner adversity, how bitter soever it may be, is a manifestation of God's love to us, designed for our ultimate and highest welfare. Now this may well reconcile us to trial. It will not make the trial less, but it will help us to bear it, just as the wounded man is braced for the amputation of a limb when he is told that it is indispensable if his life is to be preserved. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *The different effects of affliction:*—How different are summer storms from winter ones! In winter they rush over the earth with their violence; and if any poor remnants of foliage or flowers have lingered behind, these are swept along at one gust. Nothing is left but desolation; and long after the rain has ceased, pools of water and mud bear tokens of what has been. But when the clouds have poured out their torrents in summer, when the winds have spent their fury, and the sun breaks forth again in glory, all things seem to rise with renewed loveliness from their refreshing bath. The flowers, glistening with rainbows, smell sweeter than before; the air, too, which may previously have been oppressive, is become clear, and soft, and fresh. Such, too, is the difference, when the storms of affliction fall on hearts unrenewed by Christian faith, and on those who abide in Christ. In the former they bring out the dreariness and desolation which may before have been unapparent. But in the true Christian soul, "though weeping may endure for a night, joy cometh in the

morning," and tribulation itself is turned into the chief of blessings. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 22. **So Naomi returned, and Ruth.**—*The young convert:*—Little was Naomi aware of the treasure she was bringing to Israel or of the honour which was in store for Ruth. She says, "The Lord hath brought me back empty." And it was so, so far as she was herself concerned. But the Lord had brought back with her one whom all generations should call blessed; one who was to be a mother of the promised Messiah, the anointed Saviour of Israel. We are now to contemplate her admission to Israel. The young convert's entrance among the people of God. We cannot enter upon such a view without stopping for a moment to think of the happiness of Naomi in such a companion. How great was the privilege to her to bring back with her own return so precious a soul to the Lord of hosts! What an unspeakable joy it is to a Christian parent to be attended by his children in the heavenly path! "So they two went together until they came to Bethlehem." I cannot conceive a greater blessing in social life than when we can say this of father and son, of mother and daughter. This is a bond which must long outlast every other one; and a treasure of enjoyment which must remain when every other one has failed. How such companionship in religion relieves the sorrows of the road! How it multiplies the joys of the way! The mother and the daughter take sweet counsel together on their journey. Naomi has much to tell, Ruth has much to ask, in reference to the new home to which they are returning together. Their mutual prayers and encouragements are full of advantage. The blending of the varied experience of the two becomes helpful to both. The despondency of age is animated by the joyful anticipations of youth. The effervescence of youth is moderated by the experience and soberness of age. "So they went together." Unity of feeling, unity of interest, unity of hope, bind them together. They have fellowship one with another. But while Ruth took sweet counsel with Naomi her thoughts and feelings were still in a great degree peculiar to herself and completely her own. To her every prospect is hopeful, and her imagination loves to stray through all the anticipations which are presented to her youthful mind. The young Christian truly living and walking in Christ rejoices in the hopes which a Saviour gives; is encouraged, ardent, and delighted in looking forward over the way in which the great Captain of salvation is leading the sons of God. "I see no trials or sorrows in it." Thus would Ruth have said. She could have no feeling but unmingled pleasure in the prospect of the journey she had undertaken. Delightful encouragements arise in her mind which overwhelm all possible regrets or fears. How many hopes and plans cluster around Bethlehem and Judah! She knows not what the Lord has prepared for her. It has not entered into her youthful heart to conceive the actual blessings which are laid up in store for her there. But she knows that all must be well and happy for her under the shadow of His wings in whom she has come to put her trust. Nothing is in your way. You may do all things through Christ that strengtheneth you, and be made more than conquerors in Him. She comes with a deep sense of her own unworthiness. But this is silenced by her conscious desire and choice. The young convert knows and feels his guilt. But he needs not, and does not, stop to sit down under the mere dominion of grief for the past. He has his new work to do. He must press forward in it. And the cloud will pass away and leave him in the sunshine of his Saviour's love, to finish and perfect it. But the perseverance of Ruth furnishes us with another most important example. "They went together until they came to Bethlehem." There is no fact which gives the Church more peculiar joy in the coming of young converts to Christ than their habitual perseverance. They are the ones who "hold fast the beginning of their confidence steadfast unto the end." The most fruitful, faithful Christians are habitually those who begin the earliest. The time of Ruth's arrival at Bethlehem was most significant. "They came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest." The barley harvest of Palestine was in the early spring. The barley was sown after the autumnal rains, in the month of October, and the harvest was in the month of April. It was a time of special joy, the first spring-gathering of their annual fruits. The harvest is always employed as an illustration of satisfaction and joy. "They joy before Thee, according to the joy of harvest." And is it not always a scene of rejoicing when the sinner returns? The harvest was a time of opening abundance. No wants or poverty were pressing now. There is thus bread enough and to spare in the Saviour's house. And when the sinner finds a shelter there he finds all his needs supplied. His soul has

abundance of all things which it desireth. No more encouraging time could there have been for Ruth's first acquaintance with Israel. Every aspect of the land was promising and prosperous. The sight of plenty crowned every prospect. And she sees her new home clothed with every attraction. Is it not always so when we first come to the feet of Jesus and find our peace and acceptance there? Now we seem to live for the first time. There is reality, happiness, satisfaction here. We have found Him whom our soul loveth, and we have found everything we want in Him. The barley harvest was the time of the Passover. Thus this young convert from the Gentiles comes as the first-fruits of a Gentile harvest to be gathered, and is welcomed with Israel as a partaker of the paschal feast. Happy are we in welcoming our youthful friends giving evidence of their new birth for God and their living faith in Jesus to the table of the Lord. Happy is the house the first-fruits of which are thus consecrated and sanctified to be the Lord's for ever. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*)

CHAPTER II.

VER. 1. **Naomi had a kinsman.**—*A kind kinsman:*—I. GOD NEVER WANTS HIS INSTRUMENTS OF SUCCOUR UNTO THOSE THAT TRUST IN HIS MERCY. Some relation (either natural or spiritual) God will raise up to relieve His in their deepest extremity. II. SOME RICH MEN MAY YET BE RELIGIOUS MEN. Though indeed they be rare birds, yet riches and religion are not inconsistent things. III. IT IS A BRAVE ATTAINMENT TO BE RICH IN THIS WORLD, AND TO BE RICH IN GOOD WORKS TOO. So Boaz was. Boaz did not make gold his confidence, but was rich in faith (Jas. ii. 5), and rich to God (Luke xii. 21). (*C. Ness.*) *Boaz a yeoman:*—In these early days, especially under the rule of the judges, when hostile inroads on the chosen people were so frequently made by unfriendly neighbours, the man who had great possessions was in a manner compelled to be also a military leader, and so we may very justly combine the two meanings, and speak of him as a valiant man and a wealthy; or, as Dr. Morison has paraphrased the expression, "a strong and substantial yeoman." (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *The rich kinsman:*—All that the appointed kinsman could do for the estate and body of his impoverished relative the Lord Jesus as our goel does for our souls and our everlasting state. In His humanity He is our nearest kinsman. In His Deity, he is perfectly able to supply all our wants, and to defend us from every danger and oppression. As the promised goel, the Lord Jesus has a special relation to Israel as a nation, and a particular personal relation to every believing soul. He is the goel, the Kinsman Redeemer of the nation of Israel. He is the seed of Abraham, in whom all the nations are to be blessed. God gave the land of Canaan unto Abraham, and unto his seed for ever. It was to be their permanent possession. But the children of Abraham have been long since cast out of their inheritance. Their land has been taken from them, and they have been wanderers and exiles on the heart. Yet God ordained that this land should not be sold for ever, because it was His land. It was Immanuel's land. And Immanuel is their kinsman according to the flesh, who is to restore again that land to the seed of Abraham. His feet are in that day to stand upon the Mount of Olives. But the Lord Jesus Christ is also our goel, our Kinsman Redeemer—to fulfil the great duties of a Restorer to us. He restores that which He took not away. He has redeemed our lost estate. He has brought life and immortality to light, and given us a kingdom which cannot be moved. He has redeemed our persons from bondage and condemnation. We may go to Him just as freely and hopefully as the impoverished Jew went to his kinsman, perfectly sure that He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. This gracious character of our blessed Saviour is brought out in many points of view in the history of Boaz. When Naomi returned to Judah with Ruth, she found a goel already prepared for her. He was "a mighty man of wealth," perfectly able to meet all their wants, and to restore them to their happy condition again. And such a kinsman has been provided for us. We need not say, "Who shall ascend up to heaven to bring Christ down from above?" He is already prepared to be a Saviour for us, before we are born. We have nothing to do but to receive Him, trust in Him, and obey Him, as our gracious Lord. Like Boaz, He is "a mighty man of wealth." All

things in heaven and earth are His. And if we are His, all things are ours. He can enrich His people with every conceivable blessing. No good thing can they want while they have Him for their friend and portion. The name of this rich kinsman of Naomi's was Boaz, which means strength. In this name we may find a memorial of our Divine Redeemer. Jesus is our strength and our salvation. He is the power of God unto salvation for us. What mighty works He has done for us! What works of mercy is He still willing to accomplish! He is our Kinsman Redeemer. We see Him in His lowly human, suffering form, wearing our nature, and bearing the burden of our sins. We see Him in the unsearchable riches of His grace as God over all, and in the triumphs of His obedience as the Lord our Righteousness, possessing unlimited wealth to be applied to our needs. We see Him of infinite might, exalted above the heavens, angels, authorities, and powers being made subject unto Him. We see Him fully provided for us, waiting to be gracious to us, and ready to receive the poorest and the most wretched of His kinsmen who come to Him. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*)

Vers. 2–4. **Let me now go to the field, and glean.**—*The young to work for their parents*:—Ruth does not propose that Naomi should go with her to the field. She wished her honoured mother to enjoy the rest and ease suited to her time of life, whilst she herself was exposed to the troubles and inconveniences of her humble occupation in the fields of strangers. Young persons should be cheerfully willing to bear fatigues and troubles for the sake of their aged parents, that they may enjoy such ease as the infirmities of age require. The charities of the heart sweeten life. A young woman cheerfully labouring for aged parents is far happier than a fashionable lady spending in idleness and dissipation the fruits of the industry of her ancestors. (*G. Lawson.*) *A dutiful daughter*:—1. God often raises high buildings upon weak foundations. Great things often come from small beginnings. 2. All daughters ought to be dutiful daughters unto those mothers whom God hath set over them; they should ask their counsel, and obey their commands, as Ruth did here her mother-in-law, Naomi. 3. That poverty should not make any person have low thoughts of piety; Ruth doth not grudge at God for keeping His servants no better. 4. All honest endeavours ought to be used for supplying wants, but not by any wicked ways whatsoever. Ruth here resolves not to return to Moab under her present wants, as Israel did under their wilderness wants to return to Egypt; neither doth she think of such wicked ways as stealing to satisfy her hunger. Neither yet doth Ruth resolve to take up the begging trade, as too many lusty vagrants and vagabonds do in our time, but she rather resolves to labour with her hands. 5. That even lawful liberty ought not to be used without modesty and humility in asking leave. A good heart inquireth, "Is it lawful, decent, and expedient?" 6. Such as find grace and favour in the sight of God shall undoubtedly find no less in the sight of man. God will speak in the hearts of men, for all such as wait on Him in the way of His providence, labouring with their hands (Jer. xv. 11; Prov. xvi. 7). 7. A meek spirit gives forth mild speeches. Some persons have quick and hot spirits, yea, even good persons. That Naomi should be thus meek in her misery was much, for misery is a morose thing of itself, and unhinges the spirit; yet sanctified affliction contributes much to meeken even a choleric mind. (*C. Ness.*) *The gleaner*:—We have seen how ample were the relief and the portion provided for Ruth. 1. The first step is to reduce her to the deepest necessity. She has arrived with Naomi in Bethlehem. But they are there in great poverty, and with no apparent means of relief. How this very necessity brought out a proof of the excellence of Ruth! Love for her mother constrained her to seek a supply for their need. And she came to the field, as a poor stranger, to gather up the scattered heads of barley which the reapers had left in their path, and in the corners of the field. It could have been the result only of extreme necessity. Thus God brings the soul that He has loved and saved to an experience of utter want. He makes every hope to fail, every means of spiritual safety to depart. The sinner must be thus brought down to feel himself lost and perishing. And when the Spirit has accomplished this, it is an important and blessed step toward a full revelation of the riches of grace already prepared for him. 2. The next step is to take away all feeling of rebellious pride in their state of want. Ruth had great self-respect, a dignity of character that would have honoured any condition in life. But she had no pride that rebelled against her condition. "Let me glean after him in whose sight I shall find grace." This is a most happy and a most exemplary state of mind. She demanded and expected

nothing as a claim of merit or right. How important to you is such an example. But it is thus God leads the sinful soul to its great Kinsman. His gracious plan is to give everything freely, and to make man receive His free gifts with grateful acknowledgment that he has deserved nothing. But how long do we struggle against this spirit! How hard it seems contentedly to depend on mere grace to the ungodly! This is one main obstacle in the way of our salvation. 3. The next step is one of gracious providence, to bring her, as it were by accident, to an unexpected introduction to her rich kinsman. Ruth is wholly ignorant of him or of the location of his fields. She is equally ignorant of the exalted connection she is to have with him. To her the future of life is darkness. But God, her gracious God, in whom she trusts, is light in whom is no darkness at all. What an encouragement to us does this ignorance of hers afford! How abounding may be God's provided mercies for us! Ruth goes out into the harvest-field of Judæa, separated among its various owners only by landmarks, which could not be distinguished at a distance, not knowing to whose field she might be led. But God had disposed and prepared her way before her. "Her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging to Boaz." It was God's own plan for her, another part of which was now coming out to her view. And when at last she finds the gracious end to which the whole is brought, she could look back upon this, and say, "Now I know why I was made so poor, and led to Boaz's field to glean." How often is the gracious providence of God thus manifested in bringing the poor and perishing soul under the ministry of the Word. How applicable to our purpose is this illustration! The first sight of a Saviour is attractive and lovely to the seeking, sinful soul. The sinner comes into the midst of his flock, and is struck with the precious blessings which they enjoy. The Shepherd stands in their midst. Jesus is there, to awaken, instruct, sanctify, and feed His people. The hearts of all are evidently refreshed by Him. He blesses them, in the ministry of His Word, by the teaching of His Spirit. They praise Him with grateful homage in return. The whole scene is awakening and attractive. Thus often the most abiding impressions of the value of religion, of the excellence of a Saviour's worth, and the happiness of those who faithfully wait upon Him, are received. Men are drawn to Christ, and made happy in trusting Him, by the enjoyment which His people evidently derive from His service. And nothing is more important than that Christians should ever wear an aspect and maintain an influence which will adorn the doctrine they profess. "I see," said Richard Cecil, contemplating his own sinful, wasted life, in his youth, "I see two unquestionable facts. First, my mother is greatly afflicted in circumstances, body, and mind; and yet I see that she cheerfully bears up under it, by the support which she derives from constantly retiring to her closet and reading her Bible. Second, that she has a secret spring of comfort of which I know nothing; while I, who seek pleasure by every means, seldom or never find it. If, however, there is any such secret in religion why may I not attain it as well as my mother? I will immediately seek it from God." He rose from his bed instantly, and began to pray. And when the Saviour comes in thus to bless His people, "sweetly the sacred odours spread." Sinners are drawn and encouraged to come to One so gracious and so compassionate. The reapers of His harvest are animated and strengthened by His presence, and the Word of His grace goes out with special power to the souls of those who hear. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *Motive for permitting the poor to glean:*—One forcible motive to persuade the rich to suffer the poor to glean may be this: Even the greatest in respect of God is but a gleaner. God, He is the master of the harvest; all gifts and graces they are His in an infinite measure, and every godly man more or less gleans from Him. Abraham gleaned a great glean of faith, Moses of meekness, Joshua of valour, Samson of strength, Solomon of wealth and wisdom, St. Paul of knowledge, and the like. Now, if we would be glad at our hearts that the Lord would give us free leave and liberty for to glean graces out of His harvest, let us not grudge and repine that poor people glean a little gain from our plenty. (*T. Fuller, B.D.*)

Ver. 3. **Her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz.**—*Gleanings in the field of Boaz:*—1. I learn, first, from this subject, how trouble develops character. 2. Again, I see in my text the beauty of unfaltering friendship. 3. Again, I learn from this subject that paths which open in hardship and darkness often come out in places of joy. And so it often is that a path which starts very darkly ends very brightly. When you started out for heaven,

oh, how dark was the hour of conviction—how Sinai thundered, and devils tormented, and the darkness thickened! All the sins of your life pounced upon you. After a while you went into the harvest field of God's mercy; you began to glean in the fields of Divine promise, and you had more sheaves than you could carry, as the voice of God addressed you, saying, "Blessed is the man whose transgressions are forgiven and whose sins are covered." A very dark starting in conviction; a very bright ending in the pardon, and the hope, and the triumph of the gospel. So, very often, in our worldly business or in our spiritual career, we start off on a very dark path. We have to ford the river, we have to climb the mountain, we have to storm the castle; but, blessed be God! the day of rest and reward will come. 4. Again, I have to learn from my subject that events which seem to be most insignificant may be momentous. Can you imagine anything more unimportant than the coming of a poor woman from Moab to Judah? Can you imagine anything more trivial than the fact that this Ruth just happened to alight—as they say—just happened to alight on that field of Boaz? Yet all ages, all generations, have an interest in the fact. So it is in your history and in mine; events that you thought of no importance at all have been of very great moment. That casual conversation, that accidental meeting—you did not think of it again for a long while; but how it changed all the phase of your life. 5. Again, I see in my subject an illustration of the beauty of female industry. 6. Once more; I learn from my subject the value of gleanings. It is all the straws that make the harvest, it is the pence that make the pound, and it is all the opportunities of doing good that make a life of usefulness if rightly employed. Elihu Burritt learned many things while toiling in a blacksmith's shop. Abercrombie, the world-renowned philosopher, was a philosopher in Scotland, and he got his philosophy, or the chief part of it, while as a physician he was waiting for the door of the sick-room to open. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *Great issues out of little things:*—It was strikingly remarked by Pascal that "if the nose of Cleopatra had been a little longer or shorter it would have changed the history of the world." The cackling of geese once saved Rome. An apple falling from a tree suggested to Sir Isaac Newton that great law by which he unlocked the mysteries of the starry firmament and shed a new light on the whole creation of God. The lifting of the lid of a common tea-kettle by the steam generated within it set James Watt upon a train of thought that led to the invention of a steam-engine, which has revolutionised our whole manufacturing industry and multiplied human intercourse a thousandfold. A reed of an unknown species, borne to the feet of Columbus by the Atlantic wave awakened in his mind the conjecture that there must be another continent; and this issued at length in the discovery of America. A little bird, flying from the mouth of the cave in which Mohammed is concealed, misleads the soldiers that are seeking his destruction; and this influences the character of religion and the history of our race for many centuries over the larger portion of the earth. Pharaoh's daughter, coming down to the waters of the Nile to bathe, finds a smiling infant in its floating cradle among the bulrushes, and becomes God's unconscious instrument in saving the life of one who is to deliver a nation from cruel bondage, to ascend Sinai and speak with God, and to conduct the million hosts of the chosen people, amid miracle and wonder, to the borders of the promised land. Ruth's "hap is to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz"; and this eventually raises the poor stranger to affluence, and brings her name into the golden genealogy of the Saviour of men. (*A. Thomson, D.D.*) *The stranger in the harvest field:*—1. We see how God raises up friends for His people if they really need them. If you are poor, perhaps you could tell how, when times were hard the Lord has sent you a friend in your distress. Or, in some gloomy hour, when your heart has been ready to burst with inward grief, some kind Christian friend has called upon you, into whose ear you made bold to pour all your troubles, and found unspeakable relief. 2. We may learn, too, from this part of Ruth's history, what a happy thing it is to put ourselves under the shelter of God's care. Happy, happy, those who are thus dwelling "in the secret place of the Most High, and abiding under the shadow of the Almighty," who can say, "He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him will I trust." (*Bp. Oxenden.*)

Ver. 4. Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The Lord be with you.—*Salutation and prayer:*—I. THAT IT IS A COMMENDABLE THING FOR ONE TO SALUTE ANOTHER WHEN THEY MEET. II. THAT MASTERS ARE TO PRAY THAT GOD MAY BE WITH THEIR HOUSEHOLD, FAMILY, AND WOREMEN. (*R. Bernard.*) *A good master:*—1. The

works of God's providence are very wonderful works. There is a "behold" put upon this passage. Oh, the wonderful concurrence of these occurrences! Here Ruth is ordered by Providence into Boaz's field, and Boaz is ordered by the same Providence to meet Ruth in his field; and all this in tendency to accomplish a great design of their marrying together, infinitely above both their thoughts. It would plainly astonish us to observe diligently the strange occurrences of Divine Providence, and it is our great loss to live so little in the observation of every passage and footstep thereof. 2. It is comely and commodious for masters to mind personally their own concerns. Thus Boaz here did. Wise Cato could say, "That man which minds not his vintage or harvest, the further he is from his labour, the nearer he is to his loss"; and his eyes are every way, and everywhere. (1) Upon the servants; (2) upon the reapers; (3) upon the gleaners; (4) not only looking to, but even lodging in the midst of, his labourers, if he did not also labour himself in winnowing work (chap. iii. 2, 4). 3. Christianity is no enemy to comity and courtesy; or, civil salutations are consistent with true sanctity in humane society. 4. Civil salutation ought to be paid again in the same coin, saluting for saluting. (*C. Ness.*) *Boaz the farmer:*—Farming, rather than gardening in the ordinary sense of the word, is man's oldest occupation. It may not be esteemed the most dignified one, nor may those engaged in it be generally found either the most enlightened or refined of men; still, instituted by Divine authority, and pursued by man in his primeval innocence, with the ordinances of marriage and the Sabbath-day, it is a vestige of Eden. Besides, it is probable, if not certain, that it is the one employment in which man had God for his teacher. The heathens themselves represent the gods as having taught him how to cultivate corn; and in this, as in many of their other legends, they have preserved a valuable fragment of ancient truth. There is that indeed in the nature of wheat, barley, and the other cereals, which goes almost to demonstrate that God specially created them for man's use, and originally committed them to his care. These plants are unique in two respects—first, unlike others, the fruits or roots of which we use for food, they are found wild nowhere on the face of the whole earth; and secondly, unlike others also, they cannot prolong their existence independent of man, without his care and culture. When mines are empty, and furnaces stand quenched and cold, and deep silence reigns in the caverns where the axe of the pitman sounded, the husbandman shall still plough the soil. His, the first man's, shall probably be the last man's employment. The occupation which Boaz followed rises still higher in importance when we look at the multitudes it employs. Great as we are in commerce and manufactures—clothing nations with our fabrics, covering every sea with ships, and carrying the produce of our arts to every shore—the cultivation of the soil employs a larger number of hands than any other trade. Now these interests turn to a great extent on the manner in which those who follow Boaz's occupation discharge their duties: and it is therefore a matter of thankfulness that in him the book which instructs both kings and beggars, peers and peasants, how to live, sets before us a model farmer. I. His diligence in business. Boaz was not one whom necessity compelled to labour. He was rich; and is indeed called "a mighty man of wealth." Yet he made that no reason for wasting his life in ease and idleness. Nor, though he employed overseers, did he consider it right to commit his business entirely into their hands. In the first place, such irresponsibility is not good for servants. It places them in circumstances of temptation to act dishonestly. Neither is it, in the second place, for the master's interests. "The eye of the master maketh a fat horse," says an English proverb. "The farmer ploughs best with his feet," says a Scotch one—his success turning on the attention he personally gives to the superintendence of his servants and the different interests of his farm. II. His courteousness. "Be ye courteous" is a duty which Paul—himself a fine example of it—enjoins on Christians (Acts xxvi. 12). His was courtesy to a superior; but a still finer ornament of manners, and of religion also, is courtesy to inferiors. And what a fine example of that is Boaz! It is with no cold looks, nor distant air, nor rough speech, nor haughty bearing, making his reapers painfully sensible of their inferiority—that they are servants and he their master—Boaz enters the harvest field. More beautiful than the morning, with its dews sparkling like diamonds on the grass, and its golden beams tipping the surrounding hills of Bethlehem, these morning salutations between master and servants! Loving him, they esteemed his interests their own. His conduct corresponded with his speech. Observe the eye of compassion he cast on Ruth. He paid as much honour to the virtues and feelings of this poor gleaner as if she had been the finest lady in the

land. Behold true courteousness! This grace is a great set-off to piety. As such it should be assiduously cultivated by all who desire to "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour." III. HIS PIETY. "The Lord be with you"—his address to the reapers on entering the harvest field—has the ring of sterling metal. What a contrast Boaz offers to farmers we have known, by whose lips God's name was frequently profaned, but never honoured—their servants, like their dogs and horses, being often cursed, but never once blessed! "Like master, like man." Boaz almost never opens his mouth but pearls drop out. His speech breathes forth pious utterances. All his conversation is seasoned with grace; and, though the result of a Divine change of heart, how natural his religion seems!—not like a gala-dress assumed for the occasion—not like gum-flowers worn for ornament, but such as spring living from the sward—not like an artificial perfume that imparts a passing odour to a thing that is dead, but the odours exhaled by roses or lilies bathed in the dews of heaven. Nor was it only in the language of piety that his piety expressed itself. It did not evaporate in words. We have heard him speak; see how he acts! One night sleeping by a heap of corn, alone as he supposed, he wakes to find a woman lying at his feet. It is Ruth. Instructed by Naomi, she takes this strange Jewish fashion to seek her rights and commit her fortunes into his hands. IV. HIS CARE FOR THE MORAL AND RELIGIOUS INTERESTS OF HIS SERVANTS. Boaz in his own life set them an example of piety which could hardly fail to produce a favourable impression on their minds. Some are content to get work out of their servants; they take no interest in their souls—no more than if, like the cattle they tend, they had no souls at all. Unlike these, Boaz spoke to his servants as a God-fearing man. One who felt himself responsible to God and to their parents also, he charged himself with the care of their morals. This appears in the warnings and kind instructions he gave both to them and to Ruth. (*T. Guthrie, D.D.*) *Relations between employers and employed*:—The great operations which some in these days think fit to carry on, more for their own glory certainly than the good of their country or countrymen, entirely preclude anything like friendship between the chief and the multitude of his subordinates. It is impossible that a man who has a thousand under him should know and consider each, and there would be too much pretence in saying, "God be with you," on entering a yard or factory when otherwise no feeling is shown with which the name of God can be connected. Apart altogether from questions as to wealth and its use, every employer has a responsibility for maintaining the healthy human activity of his people, and nowhere is the immorality of the present system of huge concerns so evident as in the extinction of personal goodwill. The workman, of course, may adjust himself to the state of matters, but it will too often be by discrediting what he knows he cannot have and keeping up a critical resentful habit of mind against those who seem to treat him as a machine. He may often be wrong in his judgment of an employer. There may be less hardness of temper on the other side than there is on his own. But the conditions being what they are, one may say he is certain to be a severe critic. We have unquestionably lost much and are in danger of losing more, not in a financial sense, which matters little, but in the infinitely more important affairs of social sweetness and Christian civilisation. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*) *On the relations that subsist amongst the different classes of society in general, and in particular the intercourse between employers and operatives*:—How lovely is the picture of this Hebrew harvest field! It has often been remarked that the Bible, in its histories, doctrines, and precepts, is suited to all nations and all times. Though written by Jews, it is written for the world; though addressed chiefly to Israel, it is framed to suit mankind. To a monarchy in one age, and a republic in another, it gives forth its saving lessons without partiality and without embarrassment. The patriarchal institutes that prevailed in the time of Boaz were very different from the political constitutions of modern Europe. The subjection of the servant to his master which prevailed in those days was very different from the freedom and equal rights of all classes in our own land. Human happiness and misery do not turn on the form which the organisation of society may assume. It is a baptism by the Spirit that will sweeten and hallow the relations of life, whatever the external form may be into which they have been cast. In view of the condition and tendencies of society, what is the duty of a Christian patriot? He is not to whine idly for the return of the good old days, when society consisted only of two classes, kind masters and happy serfs; neither is he madly to plant himself in the breach, with the view of stemming and turning the advancing tide. Let

believing men, whatever may be their views of the optimism in political organisation, fix it as an axiom in their minds that for the highest good of the species much more depends on the spirit which animates persons than on the forms which institutes may assume. Let all who hope in God and love their brethren act on this principle, and act together on it. Consider now, more particularly, the two features that characterised the intercourse between Boaz and his reapers. These are kindliness and godliness; there is love of men, and there is reverence of God. I. KINDLINESS is greatly to be desired in the intercourse of employers and employed in our day. The master and the men must meet often for the transaction of business that is of common concern. If the meetings be devoid of kindness, they are unpleasant and injurious. How much we suffer from harsh, supercilious pride on the one hand, and dogged, discontented pride on the other! Here is a noble field for the philanthropist to labour on. He who shall increase the kindliness between operatives and their employers will be a benefactor of his race. All does not lie with the masters, but the initiative is with them. They have more in their power. We shall lose all the benefit of our vast machinery, it will be blighted by a curse, if we use living men as a part of it—if we make no distinction between the most wonderful work of God and these dead, mindless workers which our own hands have set up. Human brains have been weighed in the same balance with the dross that feeds the furnace! You take the girth of a man's soul, as you do of a wrought-iron piston, with the view of ascertaining the amount of propulsion that may be expected out of it. Both, and both alike, you put under the steam, and work them till they be worn. This is the ailment of society. Man is not a brother to man. The labourer should not fret against the employer as such. He is part of the organisation of Providence. We don't want this wheel that racks you taken out of the way. We want it oiled with holy human sympathy. But how shall we get such kindliness poured out upon the too, too sharp spirits of men, when the classes meet in a bristling array of mutual suspicion and defiance? We must go to seek it in the source of all good. The sympathy of which we have been speaking is the second commandment; in order to reach it we must climb up to the first. We must begin at the beginning (Eccl. xii. 13). We are thus brought to the other leading characteristic of the intercourse depicted in the text. II. ITS GODLINESS. Look to the subject-matter of that kind mutual salutation, and you will find that master and men lived in the fear of God, and were not ashamed to own their religion in each other's presence. The secret lies here. There would be more of human kindness amongst us if there were more of genuine faith in God. It is here that our defect lies. In great measure God is banished from history, from politics, from merchandise, from manufactures. God is not willing to be banished from any of His works. In Him we live and move and have our being. We do not propose that at your desks or your counters you should set aside your ledgers and commence a debate on systems of theology. Everything in its own time and place. There is such a thing as doing common business in a Christian spirit, walking about on earth like one who is going home to heaven. We are very low as to the existence of godliness in the heart; and we are still lower as to the manifestation of it in the ordinary intercourse of society. Very little of it is possessed; and even that little is not brought into exercise. We are persuaded that few masters are to be found at present who would not be ashamed to acknowledge a sinner's hope in a precious Saviour in presence of their workmen; and comparatively few mechanics, who, if such an acknowledgment were made, would not openly sneer or secretly impute it to hypocrisy. The two classes distrust each other. Even the religion that they have they hide in each other's presence. Alas, the only salve is by a tacit compact kept far away from the sores of society! The motions of the community are jarring and painful, because they are not softened by Divine grace. It is a short-sighted policy to shut up religion in churches and prayer-meetings, or even in households. Religion is intended for the world. The world has need of it. There cannot in the nature of things be a proper intercourse between human beings if the fear of God and the faith of the gospel do not pervade it. How can you treat a man aright when you have in view only the lowest part of his nature—the briefest period of his destiny? If all that your mind takes in regarding him be his work and his wages —the profit and loss in money of retaining or dismissing him—your treatment of him cannot possibly be right. It is only when you learn to take in the whole man that your conception can be accurate and your conduct wise. Conclusion: 1. Those who have no chief end for their souls, and no chief aim of their lives beyond things seen and temporal, bring no godliness to bear on the business of society. You cannot

apply to a brother what you have not experienced yourself. One thing is needful. If you are not working for God, you are idle; if you have not gained your soul, you have lost all. 2. Those who are born from above bring too little godliness to bear on the common interests of life. (*W. Arnot.*) *Friendly co-operation between masters and men*:—Why do not employers take employés into their confidence? I know a gentleman very well who has over a thousand hands in his employ. I said to him some years ago, when there was great trouble in the labour market, "How are you getting on with your men?" "Oh," he said, "I have no trouble." "Why," I said, "haven't you had any strikes?" "Oh, no," he said, "I never had any trouble." "What plan do you pursue?" He said, "I will tell you. All my men know every year just how matters stand. Every little while I call them together and say, 'Now, boys, last year I made so much; this year I make less; so you see I can't pay you as much as I did last year. Now I want to know what you think I ought to have as a percentage out of this establishment, and what wages I ought to give you. You know I put all my energy in this business and risked everything, put all my fortune in it and risked everything. What do you really think I ought to have, and you ought to have?' By the time we come out of that consultation we are unanimous; there never has been an exception. When we prosper, we all prosper together; when we suffer, we all suffer together; and my men would die for me." Now, let all employers be frank with their employés. Take them into your confidence. Let them know just how matters stand. There is an immense amount of common sense in the world. It is safe always to appeal to it. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *Religion in the harvest field*:—1. It is remarkable that those who stand prominently forward in the lineage of our Lord according to the flesh represent the varied callings and positions of the human race; as if He who was not ashamed to call us brethren had woven into the tapestry of His human scenes threads borrowed from every skein of life, that He might be, as it were, girt with the garment of our humanity, and consequently be able entirely to sympathise with us. 2. But whilst on the one hand our blessed Lord received into Himself according to the flesh streams from every source of human life, He manifested again in His life and works the scenes from which they flowed. So that there is no employment in life but what the labourer, be he monarch, priest, or peasant, may find a practical brotherhood in Christ, and derive lessons of instruction and comfort in the hours of toil from Him who was "King of kings," "our great High Priest," and "had not where to lay His head." 3. The leading lesson which Boaz teaches us is the sanctity of every earthly occupation when pursued by the servant of God. The real greatness of any man's work consists in its being done according to the standard and limits of religion; and the absence of consciousness or religious expression is no sign of the unreality of real religious principle. 4. In the country, a large portion of whose population is agricultural, the conduct and character of the farmer or the landed proprietor is of no small consequence. He can improve or deteriorate the race of the labourer, he can elevate or depress multitudes of those around him, by the way in which he acts; and we are bound to believe that to a great degree God blesses the crops and the harvest according to the character of those connected with them. 5. The position of Boaz is one which silences all possible objections. He was no inferior farmer who could afford to be religious because he had not the opportunity of speculation, "for he was a mighty man of wealth." He was not ashamed to recognise God, while, alas! how many amongst us of a similar class have not the courage to acknowledge to those they employ that they recognise God as the source and author of all that they possess. The example of the master will be followed by the man; if he puts religion forward in the front of his intercourse with his labourers, he will set the fashion to the field, the farmyard, and the cottager's home. The foreman will own God, and the reaper will "catch the trick" of reverence. It would seem as if some men imagined that some chance hand opened the womb of the teeming earth. It is to such men that God says, "They did not know that I gave the corn; therefore will I return and take away My corn, I will destroy her vines and her fig-trees" (Hos. ii. 9). But in the stately and almost sublime interview between Boaz and his reapers we find a practical suggestion also—why should not farmers not only recognise God and religion, but do something to realise the connection between God and themselves? 6. Another striking feature in the conduct of Boaz is the care that he takes of the purity of unmarried women when at work in his fields; for Boaz said unto Ruth, "Have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee? Go not to glean in another field, but abide here fast

by my maidens." It would almost seem as if the young men and young women worked in different fields. How lamentable is the contrast of a picture like this with that displayed by the estates of our farmers in seedtime, hay harvest and corn harvest. Imagine the long tale of shameful and miserable life that many a woman wrecked early on the quicksand of impurity has to tell upon her death-bed, and too often connects it all with the first hint given in the field in which God's merciful hand was most singularly manifested in scattering His bounties. 7. But there is one more point full of instruction in the conduct of Boaz—his consideration of the gleaners. Some farmers close their gates altogether against the gleaner, and many are strict in their injunctions that but little shall be left for the poor. Yet surely the prayers of the poor, when genuine and honest, bring a blessing upon all around them, and what is given to them is but a loan to God. (*E. Monro, M.A.*) *Business to be sanctified by religion*:—Our forefathers symbolised a beautiful truth when in our old market towns they erected a market cross. As if to teach the buyers and sellers to order their actions and to sanctify their gains by the remembrance of a crucified Saviour. In the orders which God gave for the encampment of Israel during their pilgrimage to Canaan it was provided that every part of the camp looked towards the tabernacle. And thus God taught them ever to remember that He was in their midst, and that before Him they must walk day by day. (*Aubrey C. Price, B.A.*) *Piety with courtesy*:—Piety not only stands with humanity and civil courtesy, but also exacteth and requireth it (Matt. xii.; 1 Pet. iii. 8; Luke x. 5). God hath His ethics, and commandeth good manners as well as good conscience. Affability and courtesy is the way to win others; men's minds are taken with it, as passengers' eyes are with fair flowers in the springtide; whereas a harsh, sullen, sour, churlish conversation is very distasteful to all, galleth the best (witness David, 1 Sam. xxv.), and openeth bad men's mouths to speak evil of religion. (*J. Trapp.*)

Vers. 5–7. **Then said Boaz unto his servant, . . . Whose damsel is this? And the servant . . . said, It is the Moabitish damsel.**—*The welcome reception*:—We can imagine many ways in which Boaz and Ruth might have been made acquainted with each other. But surely none which would have been better adapted to awaken the deepest and tenderest mutual interest in the mind of each. She appears in all the loveliness of virtuous modesty, humbly toiling for a mother's support and comfort, though unused to labour. He appears before her clothed with dignity and benevolence. We are now to witness their first mutual introduction, and the welcome reception which he gives to her. First we have the rich kinsman's notice of her, addressed to his head servant. Extensive as are the concerns of Boaz, the poor stranger whom the Lord hath led there is not forgotten. Happy indeed is such prosperity as this! The heart is not lifted up, the spirit is not made selfish and arrogant. There is a tender care for the poor maintained amidst the enjoyments and luxuries of wealth. Thus the Saviour comes to visit His earthly field, and calls the servants whom He has set over it to account for their charge. His ministers watch for souls as they who must give an account. Not the poorest stranger is unnoticed or forgotten by Him. Jesus may be considered as asking His ministers continually, of one and another in their flock, "Who is that?" What a dying reflection was that of the eminent Archbishop Williams in the reign of Charles I.: "I have passed through many places of honour and trust, both in Church and State, more than any of my order in England, this seventy years before. But were I assured that by my preaching I had converted but one soul unto God, I should take therein more spiritual joy and comfort than in all the honours and offices which have been bestowed upon me." This question of Boaz brings us to the reply which the servant makes. He is not inquired of in vain. He has made himself acquainted with the whole history of Ruth. And in giving his account he uses great skill and kindness in setting forth the advantageous circumstances of her case. He tells of her origin; of her return, her emigration from Moab to Israel; of her need—her poverty compelled her to beg permission to glean; of her gentle humility; of her perseverance. His account is marked by the evidence of the utmost kindness and compassion. When we think of this as an illustration of the account we may give of some daughters of the Lord Almighty who are committed to our charge, how appropriate seems the whole story. To create and maintain a familiar and intimate acquaintance with the members of the flock committed to him is a most important instrument of usefulness to a faithful pastor. The whole influence and value of his ministry will be greatly dependent on this

knowledge of his people. Suppose I could say of all the youthful females in the field around me, as each one severally appeared for my account, "This also was a daughter of Moab, but she has come back." How applicable to them would become Paul's account of the Corinthian Christians, "Such were you, but ye have been washed, ye have been justified, ye have been sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." She has come back. The answer of the servant of Boaz leads us to Boaz's own address to the lonely stranger. How kindly and freely he welcomes her to his ample provisions! And lest she should not understand the openness of his invitation, he calls her attention particularly to this fact of her entire welcome to every provision there. The Saviour's grace is thus open and free. Whosoever will may take of the water of life freely. Here are abundant supplies of all that you can desire or ask; and all given without recompense or hope of return from you. He urges her to remain in the field to which the gracious providence of God had sent her: "Go not to glean in another field." Our gracious Kinsman feels equally jealous of any partnership or competition in His work of grace for you. He lets you know that if you attempt to be saved in any other way Christ shall profit you nothing. There is salvation in none other. There is no field in which you can gather happiness, and rest, and abiding peace, but the field of Christ. Well may we apply to you Boaz's address, "Go not from hence. Abide here fast by my maidens. Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them." Nothing is more important for your religious character than appropriate religious society. The examples and influence of faithful people of God are a precious help to you in your Christian course. Be the companion always of those who fear God, and turn away your feet from the paths of evil men. The landmarks among these various fields, which separate them from the field which the Lord hath blessed, may not be always perfectly distinct and apparent to you. Try no experiment how far you may go towards these strange fields and return in safety. Dwell in the heart of the land, and make the fact always sure, that you are with the Lord and His chosen flock. Here you have every promise of protection and supply. Your gracious Kinsman has charged His ministers to help and guide you, not to hurt or hinder you. Ruth's humble and grateful answer to her unknown kinsman may conclude our present thoughts. "She fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?" What deep humility! What consciousness of need! What confession of her own unworthiness! What affectionate gratitude for the kindness he has displayed! It is just so that the loving-kindness of the Lord humbles the pardoned sinner to the dust. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) **Hath continued even from the morning until now.**—*Ruth's industry prompted by love:*—Ruth had spent no more time under covert than was absolutely necessary for enabling her to return to her labours. "It is vain to rise up early and sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows." We ought to consult our health in carrying on our labours, and not to make them a burden too heavy for us to bear. When covetous desires of gain induce men to overwork their powers, they sacrifice their health to Mammon, whom they have chosen for their God. But Ruth was labouring for her mother as well as herself. Her love to Naomi would give her spirits and strength to endure the heat of the climate. (*G. Lawson.*)

Vers. 8, 9. **Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field.**—*Loving-kindness:*—1. There may be an hearing without an heeding. 2. Loving-kindness to necessitous persons ought not to be shown in word and tongue only, but also in deed and truth (1 John iii. 1). Boaz's kindness was real, as well as verbal. Mouth-mercy and lip-love is good, cheap, and aboundeth everywhere in our age. God is kinder to those that glean in His gospel-fields than ever Boaz was to Ruth; He will not put us off with mouth-mercy only, but will make Himself known by His name Jehovah as well as by His name of God Almighty. 3. God's gleaners should have their proper and peculiar gospel-fields to glean in. They should not go to glean in the fields of strangers (John x. 5, 8). They have their senses exercised to discern good and evil (Heb. v. 14). They have a spirit of discerning (1 Cor. xii. 10) whereby they do discern the mind of Christ (1 Cor. ii. 16). This makes them hate every false way (Psa. cxix. 104). (*C. Ness.*) **Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap.**—*Harvest lessons* (for the Young):—I. THE MANIFESTATION OF WHAT IS HIDDEN IN HUMAN LIFE. In the early spring the buried seed-corn was completely hidden. You could get no answer to such

questions as, What sort? How much? Is it germinating or rotting? The reply would be, Wait. Harvest will reveal. So in human character. Thoughts, and wishes, and life-bias are often concealed. The good, through failure, seems bad; the bad, through hypocrisy, good. There shall be an unveiling. Contact with Christ brings out, in conversion and in judgment, many surprises in human character. "There is nothing hid that shall not be known." II. THE INCREASE OF WHAT IS SMALL IN HUMAN LIFE. What contrast between the seeds and the sheaf. What growth, "some sixty-fold, some an hundred-fold." So with the greatest thing in human history, Christianity. The babe, becoming the sovereign of the race. So with good and evil in human lives. The thought growing to wish, wish to resolve, resolve to deed, deed to habit, habit to influence that is immeasurable. "Who hath despised the day of small things?" III. THE RETRIBUTION FOR WHAT IS DONE IN HUMAN LIFE. In the destiny of tares and wheat, Christ teaches souls to read their retribution. It is the outcome of the life. Hell and heaven are the perfect outgrowth, the harvest of character. The good shall ripen to glory, the evil to shame. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap: he that soweth to the flesh," &c. IV. THE PASSING AWAY OF OPPORTUNITY IN HUMAN LIFE. Each season gives its own chances. V. THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD OVER THE WHOLE OF HUMAN LIFE. He cares for human life, and through frosts and summer heats, storms and midnights, matures the Christly soul. "All things work together for good." (*Urijah R. Thomas.*) **Have I not charged the young men.**—*Masters and servants:*—1. Here we see that servile natures are most prone and proclive to wrong poor strangers. Indeed, generous spirits disdain to make those the subjects of their cruelty which rather should be the objects of their pity; but it complies with a servile disposition to tyrannise over such poor people as cannot resist them. Like petty brooks pent within a narrow channel, on every dash of rain they are ready to overflow, and wax angry at the apprehension of the smallest distaste. 2. From these words observe, that it is the part of a good master not only to do no harm himself, but also to take order that his servants do none (Gen. xii. 20 and xxvi. 11). 3. In these words Boaz doth intimate that if he gave a charge to the contrary none of his servants durst presume once to molest her. If he, a mere earthly master, could procure such obedience to his commands, surely if the Lord of heaven enjoins us anything we ought to do it without any doubt or delay. (*T. Fuller, B.D.*)

Ver. 10. **Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground.**—*The lowly attitude of a grateful heart:*—I. WHAT DEEP AND TOUCHING HUMILITY IS EXPRESSED HERE. II. WHAT AFFECTIONATE GRATITUDE IS HERE. III. WHAT CONFESSIONS OF UNWORTHINESS ARE HERE. IV. WHAT CONSCIOUSNESS OF NEED IS HERE. (*W. Baxendale.*) *Ruth's humility and gratitude:*—What had Boaz done for Ruth that she falls down on her knees and thanks him for his favours in language expressive of such warm gratitude? He had assured her of his protection. He had invited her to gather the gleanings of his corn, and to drink of his water. And what thanks do we give to Him who invites us to come and buy wine and milk from Him without money and without price? Ruth thought herself greatly honoured by the attentions of Boaz. She was a stranger and foreigner, an alien to the commonwealth of Israel, and did not reckon herself entitled to any kindness from the people of the Lord. The humble are always disposed to be thankful, and therefore they are always happy. When men are swelled with such a sense of their own merit that they think themselves entitled to everything, they will never be pleased. But you can scarcely displease the humble man, because he thinks anything better than he deserves. He enjoys peace in his own bosom, because his expectations are seldom disappointed. He acquires the goodwill of all around him, because he is thankful for the smallest favours, and not dissatisfied when he meets with none. (*G. Lawson.*)

Ver. 11. **It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law.**—*The praise of virtue:*—I. THAT VIRTUE SHALL NOT WANT TRUMPETERS TO SOUND OUT HER PRAISES TO THE FULL (Psa. xxxvii. 6). II. THAT WELL-DOING PROCURETH FAVOUR TO THE POOR, THOUGH STRANGERS, AT THE HANDS OF THE VIRTUOUS; for this was the cause of Boaz's love to Ruth, as here he acknowledgeth; and this is true godliness, to love others for their goodness. (*R. Bernard.*) *The gracious approbation:*—Ruth begins now to reap the abundant harvest which is growing for her in the Divine purposes of mercy—a harvest of which Boaz's fields are only a part, and of which indeed all that Boaz possessed was but a feeble

illustration. She had been faithful in that which appeared to be the least, and now she was to be rewarded with that which seemed to be much. We have first to remark upon the gracious approbation which Boaz bestows upon her whole history, though he knew not her personally. It is thus you may often think yourself unknown, and unobserved in your efforts to do right in your different relations of life, when there are many eyes upon you, watching your character, and many ears may be listening to what the Lord has enabled you thus to do for Him. Give yourself no concern about this. God, your guardian and protector, will see that you have all the reputation and recompense which is good for you. Ruth supposed herself concealed in the field of Boaz. But he declares to her that her faithfulness to Naomi had been fully related to him, and he knew her well. Thus the Saviour recounts to His people, and for them, the acts of their life which have manifested their love to Him. Nothing that you do is worthy the Saviour's notice. But nothing that you really do for Him will be unnoticed by Him. You will never be rewarded for your works. But you will be judged by your works. They are the proofs of your faith, as the fruits on the tree are the evidences of its character and its worth. Certainly there is nothing on earth so blessed and so precious as the approbation of our Divine Master, speaking in our own hearts, of the service we have feebly but sincerely tried to render to Him. But Boaz not only expresses approbation, he also speaks of recompense to Ruth. She shall not be unrewarded. Naomi may not be able to do anything for her. But Naomi has other paymasters in the Lord's employ beside herself. Our acts of benevolence and love for Christ's sake can never go without their result of blessing even in this life. The merciful man doeth good to his own soul. We comfort the needy and the sorrowing, and we are thus preparing comforters for ourselves in the persons of others whom the Lord will raise up to minister to our wants. We aid the children of the poor, and we are laying up a heritage for our children in the kindness of others whom we know not. But apart from this result of recompense, there is also our own happiness in the work itself. "It is more blessed," that is, it is happier, a happier state and habit of mind, a happier condition of feeling and thought, "to give than to receive." Whatever we do in kindness to others for Christ's sake He returns to us in our own secret personal enjoyments. He ministers to us a peace and blessedness in the work which is our inward possession, and which comes to us without any reference to outward results. But Boaz prays for more than recompense: "A full reward be given thee," &c. For full rewards in any course of human life we must look beyond the present state of being. The Saviour says of the objects of beneficent action, "They cannot recompense thee, but thou shalt be recompensed in the resurrection of the just." Whatever results come now from any of the acts of life, they are extremely partial. The final results are yet to be revealed. The abundant harvest is to be gathered hereafter. But it will be surely gathered. The Saviour shall Himself minister to those who have been faithful to Him here, an abundant recompense, a full reward. But while the Saviour thus animates and encourages His disciples with the blessed hope before them, see how the answer of Ruth to Boaz illustrates their self-renouncing mind. The more generously a noble mind is dealt with, the more humble and unassuming does it become. This is eminently the case with the children of God when their Divine Redeemer comforts and blesses them. Never do they feel so perfectly unworthy as when He pours the special ministration of the oil of gladness into their souls. But all this only increases their sense of their own unworthiness of such mercy. And their cry and prayer is, that they may still find favour in His sight—that He would look upon them with eyes of mercy, and think of them according to His own grace and not according to their merits. Boaz's gracious provisions for the lonely stranger crown and close this instructive interview. Was any conduct of man ever more delicate, dignified, or beautiful? But it is only a feeble illustration of the riches of a Saviour's grace. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*)

Ver. 12. **The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee.**—*Ruth's reward; or, cheer for converts*:—I. WHAT HAS THE YOUNG CONVERT DONE? We illustrate the subject by the instance of Ruth. 1. Many young converts deserve encouragement because they have left all their old associates. Ruth, no doubt, had many friends in her native country, but she tore herself away to cling to Naomi and her God. 2. Next, Ruth, having left her old companions, had come amongst strangers. She knew Naomi, but in the whole town of Bethlehem she knew no one else. She felt herself to be alone, though under the wings of Israel's

God. Boaz very properly felt that she should not think that courtesy and kindness had died out of Israel; and he made a point, though he was by far her superior in station, to go to her and speak a word of encouragement to her. Come, let us pluck up courage, and encourage every Ruth when she is timid among strangers. Let us help her to feel at home in Immanuel's land. 3. The new convert is like Ruth in another respect: he is very lowly in his own eyes. Ruth had little self-esteem, and therefore she won the esteem of others. She felt herself to be a very inconsiderable person, to whom any kindness was a great favour; and so do young converts, if they are real and true. 4. Once more, the young convert is like Ruth because he has come to trust under the wings of Jehovah, the God of Israel. This is what our young converts have done: they have come, not to trust themselves, but to trust in Jesus. They have come to find a righteousness in Christ—aye, to find everything in Him. II. WHAT IS THE FULL REWARD OF THOSE WHO COME TO TRUST UNDER THE WINGS OF GOD? I would answer that a full reward will come to us in that day when we lay down these bodies of flesh, that they may sleep in Jesus, while our unclothed spirits are absent from the body but present with the Lord. But there is a present reward, and to that Boaz referred. There is in this world a present recompense for the godly, notwithstanding the fact that many are the afflictions of the righteous. Even in losing the present life for Christ's sake we are saving it, and self-denial and taking up the cross are but forms of blessedness. Do you ask me, "How shall we be rewarded for trusting in the Lord?" 1. I answer, first, by the deep peace of conscience which He will grant you. Can any reward be better than this? That, however, is only the beginning of the believer's reward. 2. He that has come to trust in God shall be "quiet from fear of evil." What a blessing that must be! "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord." 3. More than this: the man who trusts in God rests in Him with respect to all the supplies he now needs, or shall ever need. 4. Another part of the believer's great gain lies in the consciousness that all things are working together for his good. Nothing is, after all, able to injure us. Neither pains of body, nor sufferings of mind, nor losses in business, nor cruel blows of death, can work us real ill. Is not this a reward for which a man may well forego the flatteries of sin? 5. Then, let me tell you, they that trust in God and follow Him have another full reward, and that is, the bliss of doing good. Can any happiness excel this? 6. Many other items make up the full of the reward; but perhaps the chief of all is communion with God. III. WHAT FIGURE SETS FORTH THIS FULL REWARD? I do not think that Boaz knew the full meaning of what he said. He could not foresee all that was appointed of the Lord. In the light of Ruth's history we will read the good man's blessing. This poor stranger, Ruth, in coming to put her trust in the God of Israel, was giving up everything; yes, but she was also gaining everything. Ah! when you come to trust in Christ, you find in the Lord Jesus Christ one who is next of kin to you, who redeems your heritage, and unites you to Himself. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *God's reward:*—A military gentleman once said to an excellent old minister in the North of Scotland, who was becoming infirm, "Why, if I had power over the pension list, I would have you put on half-pay for your long and faithful services." He replied, "Ah, my friend, your master may put you off with half-pay, but my Master will not serve me so meanly—He will give me full-pay. Through grace I expect a full reward." **Under whose wings thou art come to trust.**—*The wings of God:*—1. They were swift wings under which Ruth had come to trust. There is nothing in all the handiwork of God more curious than a bird's wing. You have been surprised sometimes to see how far a bird can fly with one stroke of the wings; and, when it has food in prospect, or when it is affrighted, the pulsations of the bird's wings are unimaginable for velocity. The English lords used to pride themselves on the speed of their falcons. These birds, when trained, had in them the dart of the lightning. How swift were the carrier-pigeons in the time of Anthony and at the siege of Jerusalem! Wonderful speed! A carrier-pigeon was thrown up at Rouen and came down at Ghent—ninety miles off—in one hour. The carrier-pigeons were the telegraphs of the olden time. Swallows have been shot in our latitude having the undigested rice of Georgia swamps in their crops, showing that they had come four hundred miles in six hours. It has been estimated that, in the ten years of a swallow's life, it flies far enough to have gone round the world eighty-nine times, so great is its velocity. And so the wings of the Almighty, spoken of in the text, are swift wings. They are swift when they drop upon the

foe, and swift when they come to help God's friends. 2. The wings under which Ruth had come to trust were very broad wings. There have been eagles shot on the Rocky Mountains with wings that were seven feet from tip to tip. When the king of the air sits on the crag the wings are spread over all the eaglets in the eyrie, and when the eagle starts from the rock the shadow is like the spreading of a storm cloud. So the wings of God are broad wings. They cover up all our wants, all our sorrows, all our sufferings. He puts one wing over our cradle, and He puts the other over our grave. Yes, it is not a desert in which we are placed; it is a nest. Sometimes it is a very hard nest, like that of the eagle, spread on the rock, with ragged moss and rough sticks, but still it is a nest; and, although it may be very hard under us, over us are the wings of the Almighty. 3. The wings under which Ruth came to trust were strong wings. The strength of a bird's wing—of a sea-fowl's wing, for example—you might guess from the fact that sometimes for five, six, or seven days it seems to fly without resting. There have been condors in the Andes that could overcome an ox or a stag. There have been eagles that have picked up children and swung them to the top of the cliffs. The flap of an eagle's wing has death in it. There are birds whose wings are packed with strength to fly, to lift, to destroy. So the wings of God are strong wings. Mighty to save. Mighty to destroy. 4. The wings under which Ruth had come to trust were gentle wings. There is nothing softer than a feather. You have noticed when a bird returns from flight how gently it stoops over the nest. The young birds are not afraid of having their lives trampled out by the mother-bird; the old whip-poor-will drops into its nest of leaves, the oriole into its casket of bark, the humming-bird into its hammock of moss, gentle as the light. And so, says the psalmist, He shall cover thee with His wing. Oh, the gentleness of God! But even that figure does not fully set it forth; for I have sometimes looked into the bird's nest and seen a dead bird, its life having been trampled out by the mother-bird. But no one that ever came under the feathers of the Almighty was trodden on. Blessed nest! warm nest! Why will men stay out in the cold to be shot of temptation and to be chilled by the blast, when there is this Divine shelter? (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *Jehovah's wings*:—Some have imagined the reference to be to a hen, beneath whose wings her little birds flee for shelter and warmth, according to one memorable and touching comparison used by our Lord (Luke xiii. 34). It has been suggested by others that the allusion is to the mercy-seat in the holy of holies in the ancient tabernacle, over which the wings of the cherubim stretched from the one extremity to the other, and above which the Divine glory shone with benignant radiance. Nothing could be more sublimely descriptive of dedication to the service of the true God—committing oneself to Him for providential protection and salvation, and seeking the loving fellowship of His Church—than "coming to trust beneath Jehovah's wings." (*A. Thomson, D.D.*)

Ver. 13. Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord; for that thou hast comforted me.—*Good from encouraging words*:—Is there not a useful suggestion in all this to persons in places of authority and influence? There is sometimes a grievous fault in withholding praise from others. At the fountain-head of some of our greatest rivers a slight touch of the hand or foot would be sufficient to determine the course in which they should ever afterwards flow. And, in like manner, a kind word spoken to another at a moment when the heart is ready to faint may be the means of dispelling the chill of despondency, of stimulating the efforts of an honest industry, of confirming good resolutions, and of helping to fix the future destiny of a brother. Some persons are far too much afraid of the effect of a little generous and well-timed praise. They would keep all their flowers in an ice-house. Letting in a little sunshine upon them at times would not be amiss. Let masters and parents and teachers try the experiment of what an encouraging word or look can sometimes do. Let it be distinctly seen by those whom they can influence that they are on the side of whatever is virtuous in effort, noble in aim, and heavenward in aspiration. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. **14. At mealtime come thou hither.**—*The common meal*:—1. It should indicate the Divine hand in providing it. 2. It should minister to the calm contentment of our hearts. 3. It should indicate a self-respect before men. 4. It should prepare for the next duties in life. (*E. Price.*) *Mealtime in the cornfields*:—I. THAT GOD'S REAPERS HAVE THEIR MEALTIMES. The reapers in Jesus'

fields shall not only receive a blessed reward at the last, but they shall have plenteous comforts by the way. 1. God has ordained certain mealtimes for His reapers; and He has appointed that one of these shall be when they come together to listen to the Word preached. When the Lord blesses the provisions of His house, no matter how many thousands there may be, all His poor shall be filled with bread. 2. Often, too, our gracious Lord appoints us mealtimes in our private readings and meditations. Here it is that His "paths drop fatness." No wonder that men grow so slowly, when they meditate so little. We must take the truth, and turn it over and over again in the inward parts of our spirit, and so shall we extract suitable nourishment therefrom. 3. Let us not forget that there is one specially ordained mealtime which ought to occur at least once in the week—I mean the Supper of the Lord. There you have literally, as well as spiritually, a meal. 4. Besides these regular mealtimes, there are others which God gives us, at seasons when, perhaps, we little expect them. You have been walking the street, and suddenly you have felt a holy flowing out of your soul toward God; or in the middle of business your heart has been melted with love and made to dance for joy, even as the brooks, which have been bound with winter's ice, leap to feel the touch of spring. You have been groaning, dull, and earthbound; but the sweet love of Jesus has enwrapped your heart when you scarce thought of it. Seasons, too, we have had on our sick-beds. 5. Let me observe that, while these mealtimes come, we know not exactly when, there are certain seasons when we may expect them. The Eastern reapers generally sit down under the shelter of a tree, or a booth, to take refreshment during the heat of the day. And certain I am, that when trouble, affliction, persecution, and bereavement become the most painful to us, it is then that the Lord hands out to us the sweetest comforts. Again, these mealtimes frequently occur before a trial. Sweet cordials prepare for stern conflicts. Times of refreshing also occur after trouble or arduous service. Christ was tempted of the devil, and afterwards angels came and ministered unto Him. After conflict, content; after battle, banquet. When thou hast waited on thy Lord, then thou shalt sit down, and thy Master will gird Himself and wait upon thee. II. To THESE MEALS THE GLEANER IS AFFECTIONATELY INVITED. That is to say, the poor trembling stranger who has not strength enough to reap, who has no right to be in the field except the right of charity—the poor, trembling sinner, conscious of his own demerit, and feeling but little hope and little joy, is invited to the feast of love. 1. In the text the gleaner is invited to come: "At mealtime come thou hither." We trust none of you will be kept away from the place of holy feasting by any shame on account of your dress, or your personal character, or your poverty; nay, nor even on account of your physical infirmities. 2. Moreover, she was bidden not only to come, but to eat. Whatever there is sweet and comfortable in the Word of God, ye that are of a broken and contrite spirit are invited to partake of it. You are saying in your heart, "Oh, that I could eat the children's bread!" You may eat it. You say, "I have no right." But the Lord gives you the invitation! Come without any other right than the right of His invitation. 3. Note further, that she was not only invited to eat the bread, but to dip her morsel in the vinegar. The Lord's reapers have sauce with their bread; they have not merely doctrines, but the holy unction which is the essence of doctrines; they have not merely truths, but a hallowed delight accompanies the truths. III. BOAZ REACHES HER THE PARCHED CORN. None but the Lord of the harvest can hand out the choicest refreshments of spiritual minds. How does He do this? 1. By His gracious Spirit He first of all inspires your faith. 2. Having done this, the Saviour does more; He sheds abroad the love of God in your heart. 3. But Jesus does more than this: He reaches the parched corn with His own hand, when He gives us close communion with Himself. 4. Yet once more let me add, the Lord Jesus is pleased to reach the parched corn, in the best sense, when the Spirit gives us the infallible witness within that we are "born of God." Philip de Morny, who lived in the time of Prince Henry of Navarre, was wont to say that the Holy Spirit had made his own salvation to him as clear a point as a problem demonstrated in Euclid. The sun in the heavens is not more clear to the eye than his present salvation to an assured believer; such a man could as soon doubt his own existence as suspect his possession of eternal life. IV. After Boaz had reached the parched corn, we are told that "SHE DID EAT, AND WAS SUFFICED, AND LEFT." So shall it be with every Ruth. Sooner or later every penitent shall become a believer, every mourner a singer. 1. "She did eat, and was sufficed." Your head shall be satisfied with the precious truth which Christ reveals; your

heart shall be content with Jesus, as the altogether lovely object of affection; your hope shall be filled, for whom have you in heaven but Christ? Your desire shall be satiated, for what can even your desire hunger for more than "to know Christ, and to be found in Him"? You shall find Jesus charm your conscience, till it is at perfect peace; He shall content your judgment, till you know the certainty of His teachings; He shall supply your memory with recollections of what He did, and gratify your imagination with the prospects of what He is yet to do. 2. "She was sufficed, and left." Some of us have had deep draughts of love; we have thought that we could take in all of Christ, but when we have done our best, we have had to leave a vast remainder. There are certain sweet things in the Word of God which you and I have not enjoyed yet, and which we cannot enjoy yet; and these we are obliged to leave for a while, till we are better prepared to receive them. Did not our Lord say, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now"? There is a special knowledge to which we have not attained, a place of intimate fellowship with Christ which we have not yet occupied. There is yet a beyond, and there will be for ever. 3. A verse or two further on we are told what Ruth did with her leavings. It is very wrong, I believe, at feasts to carry anything home with you; but she was not under any such regulation, for that which was left she took home and gave to Naomi. So it shall be even with you, poor tremblers, who think you have no right to a morsel for yourselves; you shall be allowed to eat, and when you are quite sufficed, you shall have courage to bear away a portion to others who are hungering at home. When you hear a sermon you think, "My poor mother cannot get out to-day; how I wish she could have been here, for that sentence would have comforted her. If I forget everything else, I will tell her that." Cultivate an unselfish spirit. Seek to love as you have been loved. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Vers. 15, 16. **Let her glean even among the sheaves.**—*Spiritual gleaning:*— I. The God of the whole earth is A GREAT HUSBANDMAN. This is true in natural things. As a matter of fact all farm operations are carried on by His power and prudence. In spiritual matters God is a great Husbandman; and there, too, all His works are done for His children, that they may be fed upon the finest of the wheat. Permit me to speak of the wide gospel-fields which our heavenly Father farms for the good of His children. Every field which our heavenly Father tills yields a plentiful harvest, for there are no failures or famines with Him. 1. One part of His farm is called doctrine field. What full sheaves of finest wheat are to be found there! Gospel doctrine is always safe doctrine. You may feast upon it till you are full, and no harm will come of it. Be afraid of no revealed truth. 2. The great Husbandman has another field called promise field; of that I shall not need to speak, for I hope you often enter and glean from it. The whole field is your own, every ear of it; you may draw out from the sheaves themselves, and the more you take the more you may. 3. Then there is ordinance field; a great deal of good wheat grows in this field. In all the estate no field is to be found to rival this centre and crown of all the domain: this is the King's acre. Gospel gleaner, abide in that field; glean in it on the first day of every week, and expect to see your Lord there; for it is written, "He was known of them in the breaking of bread." 4. Fellowship and communion with Christ. This is the field for the Lord's choicest ones to glean in. II. A HUMBLE GLEANER. 1. The believer is a favoured gleaner, for he may take home a whole sheaf, if he likes: he may bear away all that he can possibly carry, for all things are freely given him of the Lord. Alas, our faith is so little that we rather glean than reap; we are straitened in ourselves, not in our God. May you all outgrow the metaphor, and come home, bringing your sheaves with you. 2. Again, we may remark that the gleaner, in her business has to endure much toil and fatigue. I know a friend who walks five miles every Sunday to hear the gospel, and has the same distance to return. Another thinks little of a ten miles' journey; and these are wise, for to hear the pure Word of God no labour is extravagant. 3. We remark, next, that every ear the gleaner gets she has to stoop for. We will go down on our knees in prayer, and stoop by self-humiliation and confession of ignorance, and so gather with the hand of faith the daily bread of our hungering souls. 4. Note, in the next place, that what a gleaner gets she wins ear by ear; occasionally she picks up a handful at once, but as a rule it is straw by straw. Now, where there are handfuls to be got at once, there is the place to go and glean; but if you cannot meet with such abundance, be glad to gather ear by ear. That is a sorry ministry which

yields nothing. Go and glean where the Lord has opened the gate for you. Why the text alone is worth the journey; do not miss it. 5. Note, next, that what the gleaner picks up she keeps in her hand; she does not drop the corn as fast as she gathers it. Be attentive, but be retentive too. Gather the grain and tie it up in bundles for carrying away with you, and mind you do not lose it on the road home. Do not lose by trifling talk that which may make you rich to all eternity. 6. Then, again, the gleaner takes the wheat home and threshes it. It is a wise thing to thresh a sermon whoever may have been the preacher, for it is certain that there is a portion of straw and chaff about it. Many thresh the preacher by finding needless fault; but that is not half so good as threshing the sermon to get out of it the pure truth. 7. And then, in the last place, the good woman, after threshing the corn, no doubt winnowed it. Ruth did all this in the field; but you can scarcely do so. You must do some of the work at home. Separate between the precious and the vile, and let the worthless material go where it may; you have no use for it, and the sooner you are rid of it the better. Judge with care; reject false teaching with decision, and retain true doctrine with earnestness, so shall you practise the enriching art of heavenly gleaning. III. A GRACIOUS PERMISSION GIVEN: "Let her glean among the sheaves, and reproach her not." We have no right to any heavenly blessings of ourselves; our portion is due to free and sovereign grace. I tell you the reasons that moved Boaz's heart to let Ruth go among the sheaves. The master motive was because he loved her. He would have her go there because he had conceived an affection for her, which he afterwards displayed in grander ways. So the Lord lets His people come and glean among the sheaves, because He loves them. There was another reason why Boaz allows Ruth to glean among the sheaves; it was because he was her relative. This is why our Lord gives us choice favours at times, and takes us into His banqueting-house in so gracious a manner. He is our next of kin, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. Oh, child of God, never be afraid to glean! Have faith in God, and take the promises home to yourself. Jesus will rejoice to see you making free with His good things. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The benevolence of Boaz*:—This benevolence of Boaz seems to me to have two lessons in it: one practical—how we should do our benevolence; and one theological—how God does His benevolence. You will see, in the first place, that Boaz does not give her the wheat. Generous as he is, she earns what she gets. He does not send her back home and send the young men with sheaves after her; he lets her work for what she receives. To give something for nothing is always a dangerous piece of business. Sometimes we must do it, it is true, but it is not the ideal kind of benevolence. If you desire to do something for the poor that will endure, let them do something to earn that which they receive from you. And yet while Boaz thus allows her to earn what she receives, so that she is no pauper, no beggar, has no self-respect taken away from her, he does it largely and with a great, generous mood, not in a niggardly way. But, most of all, he gives her secretly. Boaz anticipated Christ. A great many years before Christ had said, "Let not your right hand know what your left hand does," Boaz practised that maxim. He hid his benevolence from this woman, and Boaz enjoyed the benevolence all the more because she did not understand it. In our benevolence let us maintain the self-respect of those we aid; let us not make paupers of them; and strive how we can do the most good with the least possible display. That is not the ordinary rule, but it is a good one. But this story of the benevolence of Boaz is also a parable. It indicates the way in which God does His good works among men. Did you ever think how true it is that God also maintains our self-respect when He gives to us—how very little He gives unless we do something to get the gift? When we pray for bread for our need, He does not give us the bread; He gives us a piece of land, and a plough, and a hoe, and we must sweat for the bread. When we pray for clothing, He does not send the clothing; He gives us that out of which we can by our own industry make the clothing. It is certainly true in the material realm. It is true in the intellectual realm. The world is full of wisdom, full of the resources out of which wisdom is gathered; but we must gather it; we cannot get our wisdom ready-made. It is not handed to us. And this is equally true in the spiritual realm. God no more hands the bread of life ready-made than He hands the material bread ready-made. But how generously He gives to those who are willing to work for Him, and take that given in that spirit which preserves the self-respect while receiving the benevolence! We cut down the forests and find the coal-mine; we exhaust the ocean of its whales and find gas and electricity to take their place;

and now the scientific men are discussing the problem whether they cannot find a way to utilise the seemingly wasted sunlight. Nature has reservoired them in the coal-fields—that is, God has reservoired them—and out of its reservoir we gather the light. But now men are beginning to say, "Can we not reservoir this sunlight, this heat that goes to waste, and make it do the world's work for us?" The world is full of God's gifts. He only waits for us with pick and axe and hoe, with sweat of brain and sweat of body, to find a way to realise them. And as God sets us to work to get His gifts, and as God fills the world full with them, so God conceals Himself in the giving. I turn to my books of literature, and I find praises of Nature. Nature! What is Nature but a word for God? What is Nature but the minister and servant? What is Nature but the elements that are dropping the great sheaves of wheat in our path, and we do not know that Boaz is hiding behind the hedge smiling at our joy in our discovery. God conceals Himself. He ministers through others, and takes as to Himself the thanks we give to them. (*Lyman Abbott, D.D.*) *Combination of strength and gentleness in Boaz*:—There are persons to be met with in social life who, while possessing the more solid qualities of moral excellence, are singularly deficient in the more graceful. They have honesty, but they have no sensibility; they have truth, but they are strangely wanting in tenderness. You have the marble column, but you have not the polish or the delicate tracery on its surface; you have the rugged oak, but you miss the jasmine or the honeysuckle creeping gracefully around it from its roots. But the conduct of Boaz, as we stand and hear him giving those directions to his reapers, proves the compatibility of those two forms of excellence, and how the strong and the amiable may meet and harmonise in the same character. They do always meet in the highest forms of moral greatness. (*A. Thomson, D.D.*) *The refining art of doing good*:—I speak of the art of doing good because it deserves a place among the beautiful arts of earth and heaven. We speak "of the refinement of the arts." Men may cultivate the beautiful and be no better at heart for it all. The beautiful has no ministry to those who reject the great Artist of the universe. He would have saved the world long ago by the ministry of the beautiful had it been possible. What pictures are like those He hangs before us every day? What sunsets represented on the canvas are like the real sunsets? When we love the great Artist out of whose mind has poured all the beauty there is in the world, then every leaf and every flower, every sunrise and every sunset, every vision of beauty in earth or sky or sea, has its tender, gentle, refining influence upon the adoring heart. This art of doing good refines the heart and life even more than the study of the beautiful. (*C. C. McCabe, D.D.*)

Ver. 17. So she gleaned in the field until even.—*Persevering labour*:—1. Gleaners in gospel-fields should continue in their gleaning work from morning to evening. How many are but half Sabbath folk, that can spare to spend a morning in Sabbath service, but are for their pastimes after that! Ruth was none of those lazy gleaners. 2. Though God be very bountiful to us, yet will He have us to use all the means in a way of subserviency to His bounty. God will give us at the second-hand what He would not give us at first-hand; He will give us grace and knowledge by the use of the means, which He gives not immediately from Himself. "God sells all for labour," saith Hesiod. (*C. Ness.*) *Labour*:—I. NO LABOUR IS TOO INSIGNIFICANT FOR LOVE. "So she gleaned." She was of a good family, accustomed to a life of ease and plenty. That which she does now is anything but dignified. 1. A work for the commonest powers. 2. A work for the commonest people. 3. A work whose results bear no comparison to the expenditure of labour. 4. A work in which is redone that which has been considered as done. Men measure the worth of work by its conspicuousness. The real worth of work lies in meeting the necessity for its existence, and the motive which inspires it. Two lives depend upon her toil—then her work has worth; she loves the woman for whom she toils—then her work has dignity. Her love consecrates lowest means for highest ends. II. NO RESULTS OF LABOUR ARE TOO INSIGNIFICANT FOR CARE. She "beat out that she had gleaned." (*S. B. Rees.*) *The successful gleaner*:—1. Ruth was a gleaner; and so should we be. The Bible is that field. Search the Scriptures; glean there. Pick up every grain, for it contains precious nourishment. No matter how many gleaners; there is food enough for all. 2. Alas, how many careless ones there are, who never glean at all! They loiter all the day of their life idle. And so, when night comes, they sink into eternity with nothing done. 3. Others, again, begin when Ruth leaves off, at even. All the bright and

sunny portion of their lives they give to the world. 4. Ruth began gleaning in the morning. She felt that every hour must be employed; that every moment was precious. She laboured diligently. May we make God's Word our daily study! (*Bp. Oxenden.*)

Ver. 18. **She took it up, and went into the city.**—*Careful of the fruit of labour:*—It is no less necessary to be careful of the fruit of our labours than to labour with diligence. "In all labour there is profit," says the wise man; yet there are some that labour for the wind. They lose what they have wrought because they suffer it, through their carelessness, to slip through their fingers. This folly, however, is much less frequent in things relating to the body than in those which relate to the soul. Yet some need admonition to manage their worldly affairs with discretion; but it is far more needful to be careful that we lose none of those things which we have wrought in the service of God, for the benefit of our souls, but that we receive a full reward. (*G. Lawson.*) *Carry home the wheat:*—You know it is one thing to have grace, and another thing to have common sense. But she had both. She had got more than she wanted, and "she beat out that she had gleaned; and it was about an ephah of barley." And she carried away—the straw? No, she did not; but that is what we do sometimes. We attend a meeting, and when we go away we leave the corn behind, and carry away the straw. (*H. Moorhouse.*)

Ver. 19. **Where hast thou gleaned to-day?**—*Where hast thou gleaned to-day?*—I. THE SPHERE: LIFE'S OPPORTUNITIES. 1. The law of labour is the law of life. In this world but little can be accomplished without energy and enterprise. In every department this is true. 2. To the open and eager eye openings invite and opportunities multiply. "Let me now go to the field." "I have set before thee an open door." "The field is the world." (Isa. vi. 8.) 3. Forms of activity, how diversified they are. There is not only the reaper but the "gleaner" also. "All works are good, and each is best when most it pleases Thee." "Gather up the fragments," and despise not "the day of small things." 4. Scope exists for all. "How many serve, how many more may to the service come." "Even I, in fields so broad, some duties may fulfil." 5. Each "day" brings its demands. "To-day." II. THE SERVICE: OUR USE OR NEGLECT OF LIFE'S OPPORTUNITIES. 1. Neglect possible. There is no compulsion. The parable of the talents. The field of the slothful (Prov. xxiv). 2. Success attainable. Satisfaction in healthful industry. Beneficent results are an "ephah of barley." "Neither man nor work unblest wilt Thou permit to be." "He shall doubtless come again bringing his sheaves with him." "Enter into the joy of thy Lord." 3. Co-operation here desirable. "Let fall some for her." "Reproach her not." Community in labour. Unselfishly thinking of others and their work, without unkindliness or rebuke. "Each worker pleases where the rest he serves in charity." III. THE SCRUTINY: DIRECT INVESTIGATION INTO OUR USE OF LIFE'S OPPORTUNITIES. 1. The "day," however, varying in incident and duration, soon "goeth away." "The shadows of the evening are stretched out." "The night cometh when no man can work." 2. After that, the tribunal and award. (*a*) The fact of judgment (Matt. xxv. 19). (*b*) Its characteristics. (1) Personal and individual: "Those." (2) Practical: "Where." (3) Precise: Each "day" and its doings. How wise to let the inquiry here anticipate the inquiry hereafter. Day by day and every day should conscience put the question, "Where hast thou gleaned to-day?" (*J. P. Allen, M.A.*) *A good day's gleaning:*—Let Naomi ask us this question, and let us answer, as far as we can, out of Ruth's experience. "Where hast thou gleaned?" 1. The first thing I am impressed with is this—if you will allow Ruth to answer the question for us—no matter how dark may have been your past life, no matter through what changes and hardships you may have come, you are not justified in giving in to melancholy, much less to despair. Do not sit still; go on with your round. Cast about, go out and forage somewhere. Do the thing that lies next to your hand; go back to the ordinary common work-a-day world, and you will find relief. "Where hast thou gleaned to-day?" 2. If, in answer to my question, you would say that you are nobody, that you are of no account, and that all life's plans and purposes have come to one swift catastrophe, I rebuke you from Ruth's history. You may be poor and obscure; so was Ruth; but a new day had dawned. Keep up your heart; greater, if you only thought it, are the things behind the scenes in your favour than all that seems to be against you. 3. Then, when we stand here and ask, and answer, the questions that flew swift as a weaver's shuttle between Ruth and Naomi—does not

this come out? You have not been working in vain, if you will tell the truth. If you look at things aright, and take yet another look, especially those who are downcast, tell me if you are not bound to admit that your history is beginning to show glints of sunshine, here and there, through its darkness and chaos. Somehow you are getting conscious of it that there is an upper light breaking in. Now, think of the man who came into the field, whose presence opened up a new chapter for Ruth, and opened a wonderful chapter in God's purposes for a great while to come. On what small hinges do great doors hang! The world is still God's acre. It is not a field of riot, of chance and haphazard. It is not true that this is a world in which only the fittest survive and the weakest go to the wall. It is not true that the race is to the swift and the battle to the strong. Don't you see how the gospel comes on the scene with the face of that man Boaz? He is always going about the field, this Boaz, this Kinsman, this Redeemer. His eyes are on you, and He knows more about you than you are giving Him credit for. Blessed is He who is taking knowledge of thee. "Where hast thou gleaned to-day? and where wroughtest thou?" 4. Again, looking at this as a fireside gathering, as it were, to-day, at the end of one week, and before the new one, with its activities, is fully upon us, does not this come out of the question and the answer—that, after all, you have had unexpected success? Ruth's story shows us that, when we come across good times, when we come to what is called "good luck," we are in danger then. Now, don't go away and say that that is come to you because you rose early and sat up late, because you were sharper than other people, because your wits are keener, because you have shuffled the per cents., so to speak, more cleverly. Put in God somewhere; give God the credit, give Him the praise, give Him the glory, for, I tell you, it is all His. (*J. McNeill.*) *Gleaning:*—There are some whose only chance of obtaining knowledge is by gleaning. Their education has been neglected. Their opportunities of attending a place of worship are few. Their time for reading is limited. In a word, they are not farmers, and can never show a stack: they can only gather by gleaning. I. To such let me say, "GLEAN WHERE THE CORN GROWS AND LIES NEAR AT HAND. You will not find the corn by the wayside, or on the moor. You must go to the fields: it is only on the cultivated land you can find it." And so with the knowledge that is worth possessing. It is not to be found everywhere. For instance, it is not from every pulpit you hear the gospel: why go where Christ is not preached? It is not in all company that you may glean wisdom. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise." It would be well for us to bear in mind that we cannot be friendly with the ungodly without storing up some of the talk we hear, and that we thus store sorrow for the future. It is not every book from which we can glean corn. Reading a bad book is to gather poison. II. To glean successfully WE MUST BE WILLING TO STOOP. Gleaning is stooping. The writer heard a man behind a counter say, "The worst folks to deal with are those who know all you are going to say." This is true enough. A schoolboy who thinks he knows it all is the most hopeless of pupils. The apprentice who will not be told never learns his trade. Many a man would have risen if he could have afforded to stoop for awhile. III. If we would glean a heap, we must be content with A LITTLE AT A TIME. The woman who has gathered the largest bundle of corn never once picked up a handful. It was mostly in single ears: "Here a little, and there a little." It is wonderful what may be done by never passing by a thing that is worth preserving. To note down, every day, each remarkable thing, would make a wonderful volume in time. To do this thoroughly, we must know the value of each grain of truth. Don't let the thought that it is only a little prevent your stooping, for stacks are made up of single straws, and London is made up of single houses, which were built a brick at a time. IV. No one can glean well who is not ABLE TO PERSEVERE. Gleaning is tiring work. It means a back-ache. We must, if we mean to succeed, be willing to go on long after we are weary. We cannot expect to have it all our own way. If we were as willing to spur ourselves to perseverance as we are to urge on our weary horses, we should accomplish much more than we do. Abraham Lincoln was asked if he thought the war would be over while he was President. "Can't say, sir." "But, Mr. Lincoln, what do you mean to do?" "Peg away, sir—keep pegging away." And pegging away liberated millions of bondmen, and wiped the foul stain of slavery from America's 'scutcheon. (*T. Champness.*) *A charity sermon:*—Consider the diffusion of pleasure and delight which arose from no great nor lasting act of charity. The hearts of Naomi and Ruth did sing for joy upon sight of a relief which would soon want another: and Boaz throbbed with more noble ecstasies, by as much as it is more blessed to give than to receive. I. THAT THE POOR HAVE A

RIGHT TO GLEAN UPON US, and that part of our substance, by the laws of God and nature, is their strict and proper due. II. THAT THE BLESSING OF GOD AND THE POOR IS AN AMPLE RETRIBUTION TO THE RICH FOR SUFFERING THEM TO GLEAN, and that they have as strict a right to that as the poor have to their gleaning, and much greater refreshments springing from it. III. THAT IN RELIGIOUS PUBLIC MINISTRATIONS IT IS FAR FROM VAINGLORY TO DISTINGUISH OURSELVES BY OUR LIBERALITY. Then the more we give the more we may be truly said to promote the glory of God! Then the more we show the forwardness of our mind the more we profess subjection to the laws of Christ. (*R. Coleire, M.A.*) *Gleaners in God's harvest field*:—What have we gleaned? What improvements in thought, character, or heart treasure to refresh us in the present and bring a glorious reward in the future? The world is God's harvest field, and we are all gleaners. Some gather great swaths and bind heavy bundles, and some gather only a little bunch of grain here and there. The most poor and obscure may glean, and the richest and most prosperous can do but little more than glean. Each day God throws down great handfuls from Time's garner. Let us take one day. Man rises from slumber in health and strength. He goes forth; nature welcomes him, the heavens are kindling with the dawn, the earth is teeming with beauty. He enters the bosom of his family; from loving voices, smiles and all, he gleans. The child and mother, from a narrow yet fruitful field, are daily learning lessons that shall last through all their future life. Nothing is trivial. God seems to say to us, "Attend to the commonplace, not the heroic." It is grains that fill up our days and aggregate the substance of our lives. Where have I been to-day? What company have I met? What have been my enjoyments? Whither have my affections turned? Some gather mean and base things on the highway of life, while others gather all that is beautiful. In the same pond the white and the yellow lily grow. The one from the surrounding elements draws whiteness, purity, and fragrance; and the other only yellow hues and no fragrance. What have we gleaned from this world for the world to come from men, from books, from our families, from work, from nature, and from God? If we would have our soul's hunger satisfied and our spiritual life nurtured into vigour and beauty, God's fields are open before us and we must glean. (*J. Spencer Kennard.*) *Confidence between kindred*:—It should be one of the first principles in the government of a family that the young shall be taught to tell their parents of all their movements, and that they shall in this way have another powerful motive always to act in such a manner as that they shall never have anything to conceal. It is one of the worst signs in the formation of character when a son has haunts which he is afraid to name, companions with whom he dreads to be seen, or books which he can only read by stealth. Such suspicious secrecy is always the sure and distinct indication of a progress downwards. When the ingenuous son is ready to make his father the trusted confidant of all his pursuits and plans, of all his companionships and amusements, there cannot have been any great divergence as yet from the paths of virtue. But when the parent must needs be duped and hoodwinked, and is thought of and treated as an inconvenient spy, the child has lost the first element of filial obedience by the loss of filial trust and love, and rather wants opportunity than inclination to come out as a villain or a profligate. (*A. Thomson, D.D.*)

Ver. 20. **Blessed be he of the Lord, who hath not left off His kindness.**—*God's blessing*:—1. In its nature it is "kindness"—the very soul of tenderness to the God-fearing among men. 2. In its continuance. He cannot "leave off" making His children happy. 3. In its application to both worlds—to the "living," as the song of a Ruth may testify; to the "dead," as the hope of a Naomi must imply. Both are in the covenant of the God of Israel. 4. In its expression. He knows how to prepare some lip to give it adequate expression before the world. The old shall ever confirm the faith of the young. (*E. Price.*) *Kindness to the dead*:—The natural human protectors are gone, but the Almighty Father has taken their place. It is what Elimelech and Mahlon would have desired, and it is kindness to them. Can we not imagine that those who have passed from earth, leaving poor, disconsolate ones behind to struggle with life's difficulties, often find, in their glorified condition, ever fresh and continuous reasons for rejoicing, because they see how the ever-watchful love of God is constantly shown towards beloved ones whose comfort was their desire and endeavour? Mothers and fathers have died wondering what their children's future would be in this rude, rough world, and with their wonder fear has mingled. Yet now from heaven's clear heights they

behold God's tender care surrounding them by day and night, saving them from danger, raising up noble-souled friends to help them, doing more on their behalf than their imagination or faith conceived possible; and as they see all this, their souls are moved with a passion of rapturous gratitude, and heaven rings melodious with their "new song" of praise. Yes, the dead are wiser than we think, and probably see more than we suppose of the lives from which they are parted only by a thin, and perhaps from their side transparent, veil. This, at least, is certain, that when God inspires the benevolent to shield the orphan and help the widow, He shows that He has "not left off His kindness to the living and the dead." (*Wm. Braden.*) **The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen.**—*Christ typified by the goel under the law*:—You can hardly need to be told how a connection, the very closest, may be traced between the Jewish and the Christian dispensations. The redeemer under the law is most accurately a type of the Redeemer under the gospel. Now, suppose we take in succession three cases in which the goel or redeemer was bidden to interfere—forfeiture of inheritance, loss of liberty, and shedding of blood; and examining each transaction under its legal description, let us strive to show you the fidelity with which it images the redemption wrought out for us by Christ. I. We begin with THE FORFEITURE OF INHERITANCE. In Lev. XXV. directions are given for the interference of the goel, or redeemer. We fasten, first of all, on the fact that none but a kinsman could fill the office of goel or redeemer. Who does not see, that in laying down and adhering to such a principle as this, the law taught mankind impressively the lesson that He who should arise the Redeemer of the lost world must be bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh? "Forasmuch," says the apostle, "as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same." And shall we ever hesitate to declare that the comforting thing to the followers of Christ is that the Goel, the Redeemer, is in the strictest sense their kinsman? Christ was like myself in all points, my sinfulness only excepted. Who is the Israelite that has grown poor, and alienated from him the possession of his father, if it be not man, originally the chosen of God, rich in a birthright which gave him a glorious world for his dwelling-place, yes, and immortality for his lifetime, but who afterwards, by yielding to temptation, stripped himself of all his wealth, and made himself the heir to nothing but corruption? And when we have pointed out to you the impoverished Jew, spoiled of the possession of his fathers, unable of himself to do anything towards regaining the inheritance, and then have turned your attention on the kinsman redeemer paying down the ransom, bringing back the land into the family, keeping it in his own hands until the jubilee trumpet sounded, and then restoring it to the original owner—we think we have furnished you with so vivid a sketch of paradise lost through human apostasy and regained by the purchase of the Mediator, and given back on the day that the archangel shall lift his trumpet, and shall blow a blast at which the sheeted dead shall start, that it must on all hands be confessed that the goel of the law was pre-eminently a type of the Redeemer of the gospel. II. A brief notice will suffice for the second—WHERE THERE HAS BEEN LOSS OF LIBERTY. You will find, by referring to Lev. XXV., from which we have already quoted, that for the discharge of debt, or the procuring of subsistence, an Israelite might sell himself either to an Israelite or to a stranger. If he became the servant of an Israelite, there appears to have been no right of redemption—he must remain in his power till the year of jubilee. But if he became the servant of a stranger, then there was a case for the interposition of the goel in the law; for even after that he is sold he may be redeemed again—one of his brethren may redeem him. If the master were an Israelite, the servant was in no sense alienated from God's people, and the exigence was not such as to warrant the goel's interference; but if the master were a stranger, then the servitude became typical of man's bondage to Satan. It might have been said, in a degree, to have withdrawn the servant from the congregation of Israel; and thus a case made out for the kinsman redeemer. The goel might come forward, and the servant might be freed. You will perceive at once that, in its typical character, this transaction is identical with that already reviewed. Is it not the Scriptural representation of man by nature that he is the servant of sin, led captive by Satan at his will? The Israelite could have sold himself to a stranger; and not one farthing could he advance towards bringing back his freedom. Must he languish, then, for ever in bondage? Must he groan for ever beneath the load of oppression? There advances a Mighty One, who proclaims Himself his Kinsman, a Goel made of a woman, made under the law,

and bearing the likeness of sinful flesh; and He pays down in sufferings the price of redemption. He strikes the chain with His Cross, and it is broken into shivers; He bids the prisoner come forth, and he walks in "the glorious liberty of the children of God." III. We proceed to the third case of the goel's interference, a case which differs considerably from those already examined. It was the office of the kinsman, the goel, to interfere, not only when there had been forfeiture of inheritance, or loss of liberty, BUT ALSO WHEN THERE HAD BEEN SHEDDING OF BLOOD. If murder had been perpetrated, the prosecution and the execution of the murderer devolved on the nearest of kin to the murdered party. He must pursue the murderer; and if he overtook him before he reached the city of refuge he might take summary vengeance for the death of his relative. But if the goel were not at hand at the time when the crime was committed, it would seem that no stranger had right to arrest or follow the criminal. He betook himself unmolested to the nearest city of refuge, and remained there in safety until the cause was tried before the judges of the land. So that in this case, as well as in the others, the interference depended on the kinsmanship; nothing else could warrant a man in undertaking the office of the goel. And thus that distinguishing feature of a goel, which made him throughout the type of Christ—the feature of kinsmanship to the party requiring interference—stands out as prominently when blood was to be avenged as when land was to be redeemed or liberty regained. But wherein, you will say, in this instance, lies the typical resemblance between the offices of the goel and the offices of Christ? Created deathless and imperishable, was not the human race slain by Satan when he wrought up our first parents to an act prohibited by the words, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die"? We suppose it to have been with reference to this slaughter of mankind that Christ said of the devil, "He was a murderer from the beginning." It was clearly through the instrumentality of Satan that death, whether of body or of soul, gained footing in this creation; but if done through his instrumentality it may justly be ascribed to his authorship; and we account it most correct, therefore, to describe Satan as the great "man-slayer." He it is that hath shed human blood; and all that vast mowing down of successive generations, which keeps the sepulchres replenished with fresh harvests of death, must be referred to that awful being who was "a murderer from the beginning." And if we can thus find "the man-slayer" in Satan, cannot we find "the avenger of blood" in Christ? Who pursued the murderer? Who, century after century, unwearied and undiverted, opposed Himself in every quarter, by every weapon, to the shedder of blood, till at last, meeting him front to front, in one dread struggle, He took on him a vengeance that drew the wonder of the intelligent universe, and "through death destroyed him that had the power of death"? Who was it that, sorrowing over the wretchedness of a stricken race, "put on righteousness as a breastplate, and clothed Himself with zeal as with a cloak," and then, equipped for the conflict, sprang forth to grapple with the assassin? Who but the Goel? who but the Kinsman Redeemer? (*H. Melvill, B.D.*)

Ver. 22. It is good, my daughter, that thou go out with his maidens.—*Instruction from elders*:—Old persons may be expected to have collected, by reflection and experience, more wisdom than the young, and should be ready to communicate instruction to those that need it. Let the young have their hands prepared for the service of the old, and the old may recompense them abundantly by the words of their mouths. Happy would it have been for Rehoboam and for all his people had he known what respect is due to the wise counsels of the aged. What numbers of young persons take rash steps in the journey of life which cannot be retraced, because they rather choose to follow the impulse of their own passions than to ask and follow the advices of those who brought them into the world. (*G. Lawson.*) *The acceptance of favours*:—"It is good that thou go forth with his maidens," since he invites thee to glean in his fields. Although Naomi would not be troublesome to her relations, nor solicit favours from them when necessity did not compel her, she was not so high-minded as to reject a favour that was offered. Poor persons, who have seen better days, are sometimes too nice and scrupulous in receiving obligations. It is good to be as independent in the world as our circumstances will allow; but to be absolutely independent is impossible, and to have a spirit above the acceptance of favours, when our circumstances render the acceptance of them needful, is a proud resistance of our spirits to that Providence which manages our concerns and which manages them with wisdom and kindness when

it lays our pride in the dust. (*Ibid.*) **That they meet thee not in any other field.**—*Gadding to be discouraged* :—"Maidens," says one shrewd old commentator, "are the fittest company for maidens, among whom a chaste widow, such as Ruth was, may well be recounted." Modesty is the life-guard of chastity. Let this suggest the wider rule that every one should have his chosen field in which to gather Christian instruction and wisdom; and that having chosen it, he ought to keep to it. The common shepherd whom you meet on the mountains will tell you that the wandering sheep never thrives. And further, that we ought to choose for our cherished companions and "inner friends" those who are gleaners in the gospel-field like ourselves. Wander, through want of vigilance or through secret preference, into the society of the idle, the ungodly, or the immoral, and you are on the enemy's ground and in the midst of serpents and snares. You are out of the sphere of Divine protection whenever you walk into the circle of temptation without a call of duty; and there is no Davy-lamp in those noxious mines to prevent explosion, or to protect you from destruction. But the fellowship of them that fear God will show you how to be good, and will make you better. Even the lump of clay, when it was placed near the rose, according to the beautiful Persian proverb, caught some of its fragrance (Cant. i. 8). (*A. Thomson, D.D.*)

CHAPTER III.

VER. 1. **Shall I not seek rest for thee?**—*Rest for Ruth* :—I. THE OBJECT OF NAOMI'S SOLICITUDE. Poor Ruth: a destitute, forlorn, bereaved, homeless, portionless widow. Think of the destitute circumstances of a bereaved sinner, when awakened to find out how deplorably he is ruined and utterly undone under the fall. She was between the two countries. Just the position of a soul awakened. Yet further, see the character of Ruth portraying thy condition yet more strongly. You remark, that she had escaped from Moab and refused to go back again. There was a decision of character, there was a distinction, there was the plain mark of belonging to God. Do mark, I beseech you, here, the importance of steadfast perseverance in the Christian character. II. THE NATURE OF NAOMI'S SOLICITUDE. It was rest she wanted for her daughter-in-law: "Shall I not seek rest for thee?" I wish to give some description of this rest. 1. And the first idea is tranquillity; a sacred calm, a blessed believing satisfaction. For when the poor soul is first awakened by the Spirit of God there is anything but tranquillity; it is tossed to and fro in a state of uncertainty, a state of perplexity, a state of wretchedness. "Shall I not seek rest for thee?" Shall I not tell thee where it is to be had? Shall I not point out the fact that it is to be found only in Ruth's determination—"Thy God shall be my God," a covenant God—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost? Get to know Him, get to serve Him with decision, and thou shalt have tranquillity. 2. But I pass on to mark, in addition to the tranquillity sought, it was desired that she should have an inheritance, and an inheritance of great value too. Now what says the apostle to this? "Blessed be God," we have got an inheritance. III. THE END OF THIS SOLICITUDE. And a very blessed one it was. (*J. Irons.*)

Ver. 3. **Wash thyself, therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee.**—*Washed, anointed, and clothed* :—Need we explain this washing, anointing, and clothing? Need we point to the only fountain for sin? Need we say that the holy anointing oil, which consecrates the believer in Jesus a priest and king unto God, is His own blessed Spirit? Must we define the raiment to be that robe of Divine and human righteousness combined wherewith each soul is invested which rejects its own filthy rags? (*C. F. Hall.*)

Ver. 4. **Uncover his feet, and lay thee down.**—*Doubtful expedients* :—I. WE BEGIN WITH SOME EXPLANATORY OBSERVATIONS, FOR THE PURPOSE OF VINDICATING THE NARRATIVE FROM MISAPPREHENSION AND ABUSE. 1. We must notice the general contrariety of pastoral customs to our own which marked those ancient times in the East. What unadorned simplicity! Wearing the garments which had been worn by him during the day, he throws himself down to rest at the end of the heaps of winnowed corn, with nothing but a simple mat beneath him, and a similar

covering or cloak above him. How different is all this from the dignity and reserve which would be maintained and the many artificial luxuries and comforts that would be possessed by a person of similar rank and wealth among ourselves. 2. It is a fact that, both in those times and up to this hour in the East, servants have been accustomed to lay themselves in this manner at the feet of their master. One modern traveller mentions that his Arab servants were quite in the practice of doing so with him; and, in cold evenings, of claiming the privilege, which had descended from immemorial usage, of drawing over themselves the skirts of the long mat or cloak in which his person was enveloped. 3. Moreover, it is an interesting fact bearing on the present subject, that a very prominent part of the marriage ceremony among the Orientals was for the bridegroom to throw the skirt of his robe over his bride. The act of Ruth here described was, therefore, a significant action, in which she claimed the protection of Boaz and the honourable acknowledgment of her as his wife. 4. It is further to be observed that while the whole scene proves Boaz to have been a man most pure in spirit and of sensitive virtue, the conduct of Ruth does not for one moment make him doubt or question her purity. But here our defence ceases, at least in respect to Naomi. While we vindicate her intentions, we are constrained to censure her measures; while we acquit her of designing evil, we must blame her for not "abstaining from all appearance of evil." There was too much of cunning and stratagem about the manner of the whole transaction. There was a forcing of Providence where there should have been a trustful waiting on it; a cutting of a short way to a desired issue, instead of moving in the way which God might open to her. II. THUS EXPLAINED, THE TRANSACTION SUGGESTS SOME IMPORTANT PRACTICAL LESSONS. 1. The duty of caring for our good name. "Two things there are," saith St. Augustine, "whereof every man should be specially chary and tender—his conscience and his credit." 2. The duty of charity in our judgment of others. It will often be found to be the wisest course to form our estimate of a doubtful action by the character of the actor, and when we stand in doubt, to let love turn the scale. Persons seem to each man what he is to himself. One who suspects hypocrisy in the world is rarely transparent; the man constantly on the watch for cheating is generally dishonest; he who suspects impurity is prurient. 3. It is a first principle in Christian morals that duty must always have the preference before inclination. What true Christian chivalry, born of faith, there was in the heart of this Bethlehem yeoman! He was not only sternly honest, but sensitively honourable, bearing his escutcheon without a sinister brand on it. 4. It is surely not unnatural to ascend in thought from Boaz to Him who, in an infinitely higher sense, is our Kinsman Redeemer, who became "bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh," and died as the propitiatory victim for our offences, in order that He might reinstate us in the Divine favour, and redeem for us the heavenly inheritance which we had lost. (*A. Thomson, D.D.*)

Vers. 10, 11. **Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter. . . . I will do to thee all that thou requirest.**—*The first-fruits of grace:*—The passage before us gives a copious illustration of the first-fruits of grace to the accepted soul. Jesus welcomes, blesses, and abundantly rewards all who thus come unto Him. First we have Divine approval. Boaz does not reject or repel the lowly suitor at his feet. The difference in their outward conditions was great. Yet he neither chides her boldness, nor reproaches her with sorrow, nor refuses her plea. He listens to her prayer in kindness. He invokes the Divine blessing upon her in her need. And how his whole address to her illustrates the Saviour's gracious approval of those who seek Him! When the wearied soul comes to the feet of Jesus this is ever the welcome of approbation which it receives. The Saviour takes immediate notice of the prayer which rises up before Him, and answers it with the kindest encouragement. Boaz next illustrates for us the Divine promises. He meets the full requisition of his suppliant. There is not a want which the Christian feels for which there is not a provision promised in the Word of God. And when we come to ask His mercy, and lay ourselves at His feet in humble dedication to Him, the Saviour takes all our concerns into His own hands, and Himself promises to provide for every need. Another of the first-fruits of grace which we find in this illustration is the bounty of Divine gifts. Boaz not only promises for the future, but he bestows in the present. He will not send Ruth away empty. He fills her vail with as much barley as she could carry to her mother. An abundant supply for the wants of both. He is as generous in the amount of his liberality as he

is delicate and free in the manner of its bestowal. Thus the Saviour richly and freely bestows His gifts of grace upon those who love Him. What sweet peace He pours into the conscience in the assurance of our forgiveness! What clear light He gives to the understanding of His whole method of salvation and scheme of truth! What solidity He bestows upon the judgment in its satisfaction with His plans revealed! What joy He awakens in the heart, in the hope and anticipation of His final glory! How He makes our whole path a path of increasing light and abounding peace! In Him we are never straitened. The more diligently and truly we wait upon Him, the more abundantly will our strength be renewed. He will freely say to us, like Boaz to Ruth, "Bring the vail that thou hast upon thee, and hold it." Whatever we are ready to receive He is waiting to bestow. But the illustration from the vail of Ruth fails, in the important fact that its measure was fixed, but our capacity to hold increases with our receipts of the Divine bounty. And who shall tell where God's gracious willingness to bestow shall find its limit? As faith enlarges, and we learn to expect large things, and to attempt large things, so also becomes enlarged the measure of grace which faith receives. The history before us illustrates the Divine fidelity. With what confidence Naomi trusts in the truth and faithfulness of Boaz! The result proved that her confidence was not misplaced. He did complete with entire success the work of protection and mercy which he had undertaken. It is upon such entire fidelity in our gracious Kinsman that we are required to place our trust. "Great is His faithfulness." "His name is called faithful and true." (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) Thou art a virtuous woman.—*Ruth the virtuous*:—1. Observe, to begin with one of her humblest virtues, Ruth's industry. She accompanies Naomi to the land of Israel; but not to live on public charity or become the humble pensioner of affluent relatives. Reared in the lap of luxury, she has never learned to work; yet in a noble spirit of independence she resolves to earn her bread with her own hands. We have called this a humble virtue, not because we hold it cheap, or do not regret that under the debasing influence of our poor-laws and the self-indulgent spirit of the age, it is dying out of the land. One of the saddest phases of the times is that, for themselves or their parents, thousands now accept and even clamour for public charity who, less than a century ago, would have scorned to touch it. We call it a humble virtue, because, notwithstanding the degeneracy of the age, it still dwells in many a lowly home, stamping those with a true nobility who feel the bread taste sweet their own hands have earned, and, looking forward with a Christian's hope to the rest of heaven, are content here to live to work and work to live. 2. Observe next her humility. On losing their fortune some retain in a silly pride what but aggravates the loss, rankling like a thorn in a bleeding wound. An empty sack cannot stand erect; yet they inflict misery on themselves, and not seldom wrong on others, by the mean and even dishonest things they do to keep up appearances. Deeming some honest but humble work beneath their dignity, they buy what they cannot pay for, or borrow what they cannot return. Ashamed to work, they are not ashamed to live on the fruits of others' industry rather than their own. There is something inexpressibly mean in this; and worse than mean. It argues a spirit of rebellion against Him and His providence who setteth up one and putteth down another. How different from this un-Christian and rebellious spirit the humility of Ruth! How beautiful it is! Willing to engage in any honest work, however humble, she bends like a reed to the blast, bows her gentle head meekly before the majesty of heaven, and, meeting her trials like a Christian heroine, drinks off the cup mingled and presented by her Father's hand. 3. Observe her affection to Naomi. It wrings Ruth's heart to part with sister, mother, and country; but it would break it to part with Naomi. She cannot do it. The ship may sink; but, nailing her colours to the mast, she will sink or swim with it. Death only shall part them: nor death—the last favour her lips shall ask, that they lay her in Naomi's grave. Nobly did Ruth redeem the pledges of this affecting scene. She teaches us, by what she was to Naomi, what we are to be to Christ; how we should cleave to Him—how we should love Him—with what devotion of heart and body, of soul, strength, mind and spirit we should serve Him, and gladly spend and be spent for Him—saying, as we take up our cross to follow the lover and Redeemer of our souls, "Where Thou goest," &c. (*T. Guthrie, D.D.*)

Vers. 15–17. Six measures of barley.—*Exact reckonings of mercies*:—1. True virtue or grace makes persons universally good. Boaz was a gracious or virtuous man. He is good in his charity as well as in his chastity: he adds one grace to

another (2 Pet. i. 5). 2. God's blessings bestowed on us should be received by us in an exact reckoning: we should receive them by number, weight and measure; and to behold the quantity of them is an excellent way to get a thankful heart (Psa. cxvi. 12). 3. As charity is no churl, so neither must it be blind or extravagant. His liberality is not lavish in laying out God's blessings, but he giveth in judgment with discretion, not without consideration. Prudence is the general guide and universal mistress in all acts and exercises of virtue (Psa. cxii. 5). 4. As Boaz, so much more our God never sends home true suitors empty. He giveth, and He giveth liberally—He giveth grace, He giveth more grace (Jas. iv. 6). Every Sabbath, and sermon or sacrament, Christ cries to us, as Boaz to Ruth, "Bring hither thy vail, that I may fill it." Faith is the receiving grace. God proportions His performing to our believing: as thou believest so be it unto thee (Matt. viii. 13). (*C. Ness.*)

Ver. 18. **Sit still, my daughter.**—*Wailing upon Providence:*—1. When lawful means are rightly used, then should we wait upon God for the end. The care of the means belongs to us, but the care of the end belongs to God. We must commit ourselves in all well-doing to the Lord (Psa. xxxvii. 5; 1 Pet. iv. 19). "Until thou know how the matter shall fall." 2. All matters concerning mankind are appointed by a Divine decree in heaven, before they be accomplished by a Divine Providence upon earth. Even all matches and marriages are made in heaven, before ever they come to be solemnised on earth (Psa. lv. 22). It is our work to cast care, and it is God's work to take care (1 Pet. v. 7). We must let God alone with His own work, which is then only well done, when it is done by Himself. The man will not be at rest. 3. Conscientious persons should be restless until they make good payment of their promises. Alas, how few Boaz's are in the world, who pay what they promise! (*Ibid.*) *Avoid over-haste in the plans of life:*—I want to give you old Naomi's advice. Listen, let older heads speak to you, even let God, speak to you: "He who was, and is, and is to come," the Almighty God, speak a word like this: "Do not get fretful; do not get desponding; do not get over-eager; do not lag behind, but do not run too far forward; take care of taking things too much into your own hands." You are only in the middle of things. Life is a plan; there is a purpose giving shape, aye, and blessedness to it all. Have you seen and understood? There is a clue to the maze, and that is the Man on the field, to whom all belongs, the mighty man of wealth. Do you know Him, and is His arm working for you? Well, don't rush now; just go on steadily; sit still, my daughter. Sit still, my heart, wait on thy God, leave God to order all thy ways, and trust in Him whate'er betide. Be sure of it that He who has begun, in the way of infinite wisdom, has not done yet. Your days are only in the beginning, you are not at the end—wait on God. "Be of good courage, He shall strengthen your heart—wait, I say, on the Lord." "He who has begun a good work will carry it on until the day of Jesus Christ." Look back and see what He has done already; strengthen, and calm, and steady your hot and feverish soul; and let me say this for your encouragement, what Naomi said to Ruth: "Ah," she as good as said, "I know this man." Are you a little eager? Does your soul, sometimes in spite of yourself, haste forward to the consummation? Much more does His. He has set His mighty heart upon you; He loves you with an everlasting love; He is weary to get you, and He is shaping and controlling all things in heaven and earth for just one thing—to finish His redeeming work, and to get you home with rejoicing to be with Himself for ever and ever. (*J. McNeill.*) **The man will not be in rest.**—*Duty done at the right time:*—I. IF THIS IS TO BE OUR CHARACTERISTIC AND HABIT, THERE ARE CERTAIN RULES THE OBSERVANCE OF WHICH IS INDISPENSABLE. We must not undertake more work, or ambitiously grasp at more engagements, than there is a fair and reasonable likelihood of our being able to accomplish. We must endeavour, by plan and forethought, so to dispose of our time as to make the most of every hour that is given us to work in. Then there must be no indolent procrastination, or giving way before little difficulties, or sitting down or turning aside because we think we see lions in the way; but rather the putting forth of vigorous effort in order to realise our plans and to keep ourselves master of our circumstances, instead of allowing our circumstances to master us. The benefits which grow out of this ordering of our time, and doing the work of each day in the day, are various and great. It helps to secure that whatever we undertake to do shall be well done, by our having abundance of time in which to do it. It

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saves our consciences from the reproach and our characters from the shame of promise-breaking; for when the work of to-day is thrown over upon to-morrow, it is likely that much will fail to be done at all, according to the old Spanish proverb that "the street of By-and-By leads to the house of Never." It preserves us from that fretting of the temper which is the certain effect of hurry, and enables us to maintain more tranquillity of mind, and self-control, and self-respect. II. NEXT LET US APPLY THE PRINCIPLE IN THESE WORDS TO SOME THINGS IN DETAIL. There is especially one direction in which it is pre-eminently applicable. Suppose a man to have the consciousness awakened in him that he has never given earnest attention to the matter of his personal salvation; that he is under the displeasure of God, with a life of unforgiven sins accusing him; and that the near and solemn eternity is all unprovided for. This ought surely to become his immediate and paramount concern. "The man should not be in rest until he hath finished the thing this day." Who would sing songs to a man that was sinking and perishing in the fearful pit and the miry clay? Get him out of the pit first. He would be a fool who should propose to paint his ship while it was toiling and straining in the storm. Bring it first into calm waters and the safe harbour. But let us assume that the supreme interest has been cared for; and there are two observations which it is natural to connect with these suggestive words of Naomi. 1. There are certain duties which regularly fall to be performed by us, and which may be described as the work of every day. There are, for example, the duties of our stated secular vocation, whether they consist in headwork or in handiwork, or in both combined. In these we are daily summoned anew to serve God; and very much of the Christian's everyday religion consists in his discharging these common services in a Christian spirit. And daily mingling with these, and shedding down hallowed influences upon them, there are the more direct exercises of religion, especially those of secret devotion, on the morning and evening of every day. And scarcely less congenial with the tastes of his new nature will be his daily perusal of some chosen portion of Holy Scripture. And must we not further claim from the Christian heads of families that domestic devotion shall form an essential part of each day's round of service, in which every day's wants shall be turned to prayer, and every day's mercies to praise; in which family affection shall be nurtured and sanctified; in which the parents shall become more venerable and the children more endeared, and home become as one of the gates of heaven? 2. There is another large class of duties of a more special kind, which are not of daily recurrence, but are rather appropriate to particular times and circumstances, and may be said to grow out of them. (1) Observation of the weekly day of rest. (2) Making your will. (3) Making up quarrels. (4) Speaking words in season. Do not withhold yourself from doing good because your sphere of beneficent action is narrow. If you cannot do a prophet's work, yet give a cup of cold water to one of Christ's little ones. If you have not the means of founding or endowing a hospital, you can take a flower, perchance, and give it to some sister or brother who is pining in one of its wards, and you can give kind words and sunny looks along with it. The world around is full of opportunities of usefulness, if we would but seize them. We can scarcely stretch forth our hand without touching some form of human misery which we could mitigate or relieve. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it." (*A. Thomson, D.D.*)

CHAPTER IV.

VERS. 1–5. **Then went Boaz up to the gate.**—*Friends in council*:—I. THIS IS HOW BUSINESS SHOULD BE ATTENDED TO. 1. Speedily. 2. Expeditiously. 3. Righteously. II. THIS IS HOW DIFFICULT AFFAIRS SHOULD BE SETTLED, DELICATE CLAIMS ADJUSTED, FAIR RIGHTS ALLOWED AND SATISFIED. 1. Openly and publicly. 2. By the advice of wise men. 3. Calmly and deliberately. 4. With care and exactitude. III. THIS IS THE WAY THE AFFAIRS OF THE DESTITUTE AND NEEDY ESPECIALLY SHOULD BE ATTENDED TO. (*W. Baxendale.*) *Judicious methods of attaining our ends*:—1. The most probable means ought judiciously to be used in order to the accomplishing of our proposed ends. Thus Boaz, being restless for obtaining his promised end (chap. iii. 18), uses the likeliest means to obtain his end. Many a man loses a good end for want of right means tending to the end. 2. A marvellous providence doth attend God's servants

that do wait upon God in the way of obedience. The guiding hand of God doth make many a happy hit in the occurrences of His people. Thus the comely contexture of various providences are very marvellous to those that make observation of them. (*C. Ness.*) *Redemption proposed:*—How completely this proposal illustrates the proposition of our great Redeemer in our behalf. Thus publicly He agreed, in the presence of the angels of God, to make Himself an offering for sin. Thus legally would He fulfil all righteousness for man, and be made under the law, that He might redeem those who were under the law from the bondage of its condemnation. Thus perfectly and completely would He buy back all that man had lost, and unite unto Himself the nature which had sinned and fallen. But angels were a created nature, far nearer in relation to man. Might not the proposition be made to them? Would they not redeem the lost? Ah, willing they might be—we doubt not they were. But able they could never be. The redemption of a soul they must let alone for ever. The Son of God remained alone. His own arm must bring salvation. His righteousness must sustain Him. He was content to do the will of God, and His law was in His heart. Here was to be complete redemption. He would take the shoe, like Boaz, and acknowledge the obligation, and perform the duties of which it was the token. He would stand in the sinner's place. He would make Himself an offering in his stead. All this exercise and work of redeeming love was in the fulness of His own grace, without any connection of yours with it. Yes; just as the proposal of Boaz was without Ruth's presence or knowledge—made in her absence, while she was with her mother at home, and not to be made known to her until it was completed—so was this great proposal of the Son of God to be your Kinsman, and to fulfil for you all the kinsman's obligations, made without your counsel and accomplished without your help. This is the unsearchable riches of grace. We call it sovereign grace. It ruled over every obstacle. It met every difficulty. We call it free grace. It is extended to sinful man with no conditions. It invites him, and offers its bounties to him without any qualifications whatever. It announces a redemption all complete, and begs him to receive and to enjoy it. Thus God has chosen to redeem. And thus He has chosen us to be the subjects of His redemption. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *Fair dealing and good principle in Boaz:*—There are two things especially worthy of notice in this language of Boaz. 1. The spirit of candour and fair dealing by which it is distinguished. He knew the preference which both Naomi and Ruth had for himself; he was conscious too that he no longer regarded with indifference this beautiful daughter of Moab. His fine sense of honour was not blunted either by covetousness or by inclination, nor would his conscience allow him, even when seeking a good and generous end, to have recourse to sharp practice. Here is that "clear and round dealing which is the honour of man's nature." He was one of those men who, at the close of a transaction, could have borne to be cross-examined regarding his part in it by an enemy. 2. Then remark how much the following of principle simplifies a man's course. Boaz had his own wishes as to the way in which the transaction should terminate; and suppose him to have stooped, as thousands in his circumstances would have done, to crooked courses and carnal concealments, in order to make the matter end according to his wishes, what must have been his perplexity and anxiety, not to speak of his self-contempt and self-accusation! These are what Lord Bacon has called "the winding and crooked goings of the serpent, which goeth basely upon the belly and not upon the feet." But in following the course of simple duty, and making his inclinations and preferences wait on the disposal of God, he at once retained peace of conscience, self-respect, and a good name. "His eye was single, and therefore his whole body was full of light." (*A. Thomson, D.D.*)

Ver. 6. I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance.—*The endangered inheritance:*—Many men mar noble inheritances. I. The inheritance of PHYSICAL HEALTH. The ancients were right who spoke of a sound mind in a sound body as one of the best gifts of the gods. God has written His will upon the body as truly as upon the pages of the Bible. Every natural motion of the body is a revelation of the will and purpose of the Divine Creator. Ever since Christ was cradled in the manger at Bethlehem the body has been honoured, exalted, glorified. Ever since the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost the body has been the temple of the Third Person of the Trinity. The man who overworks his body sins against God. The man who by intemperance in eating or drinking unfits his body for discharging its normal functions degrades himself and dishonours the Almighty.

It is true that many men with broken bodies have accomplished wonderful results in life. The names of John Calvin, Robert Hall, and a score more, suggest themselves as illustrations. Let no man be discouraged who has inherited a weak body. Great souls have often dwelt in frail tenements, until the tired body was laid to its rest and the great soul went up in triumph to God. But let those who have received the inheritance of physical health prize it as one of the great gifts of life, care for it as one of the sacred inheritances of life, and lay it as a willing offering at the feet of the Lord Christ. II. The inheritance of INTELLECTUAL CAPABILITIES. Of course there are great differences among men in these respects. But in our day ignorance is not simply a misfortune; it is a crime. Christian men must develop all their faculties to their highest possibilities. Every man is bound, by the most sacred obligations, to make the most of himself for time and for eternity. What a man is intellectually here will determine to some degree what he will be intellectually hereafter. The life to come is but the developed results of present conditions and attainments; that life is but the ripened fruit of the intellectual and moral seed sown in this life. Every Christian, because inspired by a sense of loyalty to Jesus Christ, will desire to develop his intellectual powers to their utmost degree. He cannot but wish to possess numerous and varied mental faculties for the salvation of men and for the greater glory of the Lord. Divine love in human hearts puts enlarged brains into human heads. Religion stimulates every noble faculty of the soul. It made John Bunyan the immortal dreamer; it made Samuel Bradburn one of the greatest workers and orators in his Church, a man of whom Dr. Abel Stevens said that "during forty years Samuel Bradburn was esteemed the Demosthenes of Methodism"; it made William Carey a profound scholar, a lofty thinker, a consecrated toiler, and an inspired genius. Christianity adorns culture with true symmetry and highest beauty; and culture, in turn, gives Christianity its fullest beauty and its grandest opportunity. They ought never to be separated. Each sweetly and divinely ministers to the other. Let no young man or woman neglect wide reading, careful study, earnest thought. Young Christians should be model students. They have Jesus Christ for their teacher and the noblest men and women in the world as their fellow-pupils. III. The inheritance of A WORTHY FAMILY HISTORY. This is a gift above the worth of all mere financial values. A good name is more to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold. A good name is the ripe product of years of noble ancestral character. Is there a man who has wandered from his father's and his mother's God? Is there one who has lowered the standard of a noble family life and history? Is there one who is besmirching his name and staining his character by unholy thoughts and impure acts? In the name of that worthy family history, in the name of an ideal family life, in the name of the great God and Father of us all, I beseech him to stop and to stop now. He is marring his own inheritance. It is a blessed thing to be able to give a noble family inheritance to one's children. Let us carefully guard it; let us sacredly preserve it; let us continually honour it; let us never so live that our children shall be ashamed of the name they bear. Let us send it down to them as an honoured inheritance to which they shall add honours from all the generations to come. IV. The inheritance of RELIGIOUS POSSIBILITIES. Intellectual attainments and religious experiences cannot be transmitted to our children. We can transmit our vices; but, strictly speaking, not our virtues. There is a sense, however, in which we can transmit tendencies toward good and God, or toward evil and the devil. There is a Divine truth in much that is said regarding heredity in our day. It is much for a man to be able to say, "My father's God"; it is vastly easier for such a man to say, "My Lord and my God," after having been taught to say, "My father's God." Children of Christian men and women stand upon a vastly higher plane of possibility than the children of ungodly men and women. The time may come when the natural will be much more like the supernatural than as we now see it. Indeed, there is a sense in which there is no distinction between the natural and supernatural. God is active in all spheres of nature. The possibility of being translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son ought to be realised in early childhood. No man, however far he may go into sin, can shake off entirely the influences of a godly parentage and of early religious training. I once talked with a man who had just recovered from a period of dissipation, and with broken voice and moist eyes, he said, "How could I so far forget myself, so greatly dishonour my sainted parents, and so wickedly disobey my father's God?" Oh! children of God's children, prize your privileges! (*R. S. MacArthur, D.D.*)

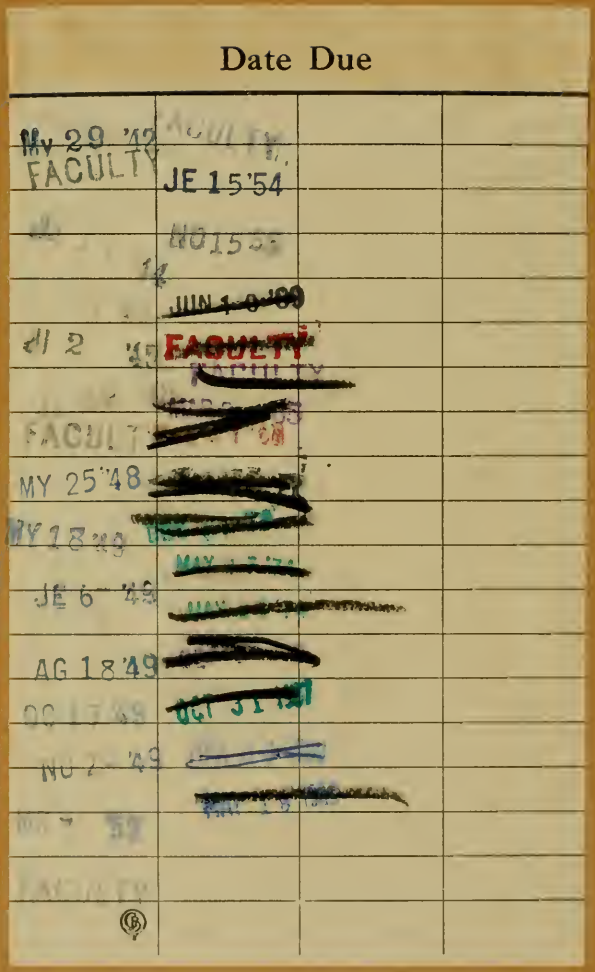
Ver. 9. **I have bought all that was Elimelech's.**—*Redemption accomplished:*—This passage brings to our view the great subject of the gospel revelation—redemption accomplished in the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ in human flesh for guilty man. Boaz took his kinsman's shoes as a simple but solemn token of the agreement which he had now assumed. He called all the inhabitants and elders of his city to witness that he acknowledged all this responsibility, and was pledged to accomplish the redemption which was thus described and undertaken. The actual accomplishment of the work now depended upon the ability and the faithfulness of Boaz. Everything now rested upon his power and his truth. Was it not just so with the hope of man from the day of his fall to the day of the Saviour's manifestation and victory? He had undertaken to be man's Redeemer. Could He, and would He fulfil the wonderful promises which He had given, and upon which He had caused His people to place their trust? The history of the New Testament answers this all-important question. These sacred Scriptures reveal the facts of redemption accomplished; the work undertaken completely finished; the fidelity of the Kinsman Redeemer gloriously established; and His almighty power triumphantly made known. This is now the great message of the gospel to guilty man. It proclaims this accomplished work, and it begs man to accept and enjoy the blessings which are offered in it freely and without price. Like Boaz, Jesus bought back the whole inheritance for man. All that was lost in the first Adam is restored by the second. The Redeemer Himself now owns the inheritance which He has purchased. That which was Elimelech's is now the property of Boaz. That which was man's, and to be in the reward of man's obedience, is now Christ's, and only to be had in the freeness and fulness of His gift. It is His own inheritance, and He bestows it upon His people according to His will; according to the measure of the gift of Christ. We have everything in Him. Without Him we have nothing. He has bought back man also for Himself. His chosen flock are His purchased possession, and are to be to the praise of His glory for ever. But the people of Bethlehem were not merely the witnesses of this covenant of Boaz; they were partakers of his joy. They united in their supplications for abundant blessings upon the noble and exalted plan which Boaz had proclaimed. So angels, the witnesses of the covenant of our Redeemer, were more than silent witnesses also. When the foundation of this wonderful work was laid in the Divine covenant these morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy. When the Saviour appeared as a babe in Bethlehem they filled the heavens with their songs of praise and prayer: "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, goodwill to men." When He was travelling in the greatness of His strength, beneath His load of sorrow on the earth, they ministered unto Him and strengthened Him for His work. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*)

Vers. 10, 11. **Ruth the Moabitess . . . have I purchased to be my wife.**—*The marriage of Boaz and Ruth:*—Two features which stand prominent in this description make it valuable for all time. 1. There is the publicity by which the interesting transaction was distinguished. All the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, "We are witnesses." The laws and customs of every country not in the lowest stage of barbarism or in the foulest depths of licentiousness have provided that the conjugal relation shall be formed in the presence of qualified witnesses, and in the observance of certain well-understood ceremonies and forms. This is appointed for reasons of obvious propriety, especially to enforce fidelity, and to secure permanence to the connection, and, by a line sufficiently distinct and broad, to separate virtuous marriage from all illicit and impure connections. Clandestine marriages are always disreputable in themselves. Then—2. Let us not leave unnoticed the religious spirit in which the union was formed. The devout benedictions of the elders and the other witnesses were showered upon Boaz and his bride with all the lavish profusion of a most hearty goodwill, and prayers ascended for them to Him who in all ages has looked approvingly on virtuous wedlock. It is one of the marks of the divinity of our religion that it touches our humanity on all sides. Surely the formation of the marriage-bond pre-eminently ought to be "sanctified by the Word of God and prayer." (*A. Thomson, D.D.*) *A happy marriage:*—Ruth's marriage was a happy one—1. Because they could reckon on God's blessing, and doubtless both earnestly prayed for it. 2. Again, we may be sure it was a happy marriage, for there was a oneness of feeling between Boaz and Ruth. They both loved God. They were both journeying on one and the same road. They were partners for eternity. It matters little, whether earthly comforts be many or few; if the hearts

within it are bound together by that bond which is stronger even than the tie of affection—the bond of grace—then, be assured, there will be happiness. (*Bp. Ozenden.*) *What a true wife ought to be:*—Marriage, to a certain degree, a young man is to look upon from a utilitarian standpoint. A good wife is so much capital. She makes him to be, by a kind of grace, a great deal more than he is by nature. She contributes the qualities needed in order to convert his vigour into a safe as well as productive efficiency. She introduces, for instance, into his intellectual nature that ingredient of sentiment which intellect requires in order to be able to do its best work. Heart and brain need to conspire in order to the attainment of the true, and without caring to assert that man is naturally heartless, any more than I should wish to assume that woman is by nature brainless, yet heart in its way is just as precious as brain in its way, and woman, so long as she is untainted by the passion of wanting to be a man, will be that member of the connubial corporation that will in particular contribute to the capital stock its affectional element. Some women may resent this, but I would like to caution young men against cherishing matrimonial designs upon any woman who is likely to resent it. If what you want is a wife, and not merely a housekeeper, you must keep your eye well open for a warm bundle of femininity that will be to you in a personal way what the fire on the hearth is to you in a physical way—a fund of tropical comfort that will keep the stiffness out of your thinking, the frost out of your feeling, and the general machinery of your life in a condition of pleasurable activity. (*C. H. Parkhurst, D.D.*)

Vers. 17–22. **And they called his name Obed.**—*Little Obed:*—No doubt there were circumstances connected with the birth of this child which surrounded it with a special interest. But take the birth of any child, and while few events are more common, few can occur on the earth which in sober reality are more momentous. What a mystery hangs over its wondrous constitution of thought and matter, of soul and body! What a capacity is there of sin and suffering, of holy service and blessedness! What will be its future and final destiny? The hopes of friends at such a moment are naturally sanguine, woven far more of sunbeams than of shadows. And there were circumstances which made the congratulations of Ruth's friends peculiarly glad and hopeful; for this little smiling boy folded in his young mother's arms was not only the heir of Boaz but of Mahlon. He was to unite the family inheritances; he was to save the name of an old and honoured family in Bethlehem from being "extinguished in Israel," and to give to Naomi and to Ruth that position of honour and consequence in Jewish society which grew out of the maternal relation. There was now "hope concerning this tree, that it would yet bud and flourish." This will account to us for the warmth of the language in which the birth of Obed was hailed. To some it may appear strange that the congratulations of the friendly women were addressed to Naomi rather than to Ruth, the child's own mother. The explanation has in part been suggested already, in the fact that the birth of this child exercised so peculiar and propitious an influence over Naomi's social position and family fortunes. It secured to her the position of a tribe-mother. It may be, too, that those kindly women had known Naomi and been her comforters in the days of her deep affliction, when she appeared in the streets of Bethlehem claiming to be called Mara—"the woman with the sorrowful spirit"; and as they beheld her on this day of revived hopes and vanished clouds the same true sympathy that had formerly made them weep with her when she wept now made them rejoice with her when she rejoiced. That we are correct in this explanation is evident from the words of the women, in which, with such glad anticipations for the future, there is also a looking back upon the sorrowful past. "There shall be unto thee" in this child "a restorer of thy life and a nourisher of thine old age." How beautifully descriptive are these words of what children should aim to be to aged parents and relatives, and of what there is every reason to believe this child eventually became to Naomi. The former clause brings before us the picture of a tree in whose roots there remains a kind of lingering life, but which, assailed by storms and smitten by other unkindly influences, stands almost without leaf or blossom, with no birds making music in its branches, a blighted and forsaken thing. But there comes at length a genial influence of shower, and sunshine, and breeze, which quickens within it the vegetative life, and covers it with the leaves and blossoms of its earlier springs. Now, Naomi's life had been to her for many years like a long winter. But this little child would bring back to her the recollections and the joys of her happier days; the blank in her

heart would be filled up; she would find something to love and cherish without restraint, and this itself would be to her a well of happiness; she would remember Mahlon and Chilion in little Obed's childish sports and expanding mind; her thoughts, which had been too much turned inward upon her sorrows, would henceforth go outward upon him, and the future would not so much be a prolongation of the present as a return to her sunnier days—"He shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life," and he shall be unto thee "a nourisher of thine old age." The meaning of this is not exhausted by supposing that Naomi would never want the means of support while Obed lived, but that his affluence would be her riches. It includes in it, besides, those thousand varied acts of respect and tenderness which we are accustomed to describe by the name of kindness. In the case of persons in advanced years many sources of enjoyment are dried up, many frailties are induced, the senses are dulled, the power of motion is diminished, not a few of their companions have been removed into the other world, and they are apt to feel, in their infirmity and inaction, as if they had become useless to their generation. It is the duty of the young, and especially of the children and descendants of the aged, to endeavour to cheer them in the autumn of their life, to anticipate their wishes, to study their feelings, to make growing frailties only another reason for growing attentions, and, by kind words and kinder acts, to shed a calm sunshine on the path by which they are travelling to the tomb. Religion, and even the instincts of our human nature, command us to "stand up before the old man," and to put honour on the hoary head. And never do children appear more lovely than when they are thus seen nourishing the old age of a father or a mother. (*A. Thomson, D.D.*) *Lessons from the Book of Ruth*:—I. In the first place it seems to me that the Book of Ruth exhibits to us AN ETERNAL LAW OF GOD'S KINGDOM; THAT IN THE WORST AND DARKEST TIMES OF THE CHURCH GOD HAS HAD HIS OWN PEOPLE. Ever since God had a Church on earth true spiritual religion has never been utterly extinguished. Faith can always say with the apostle that there is "a remnant according to the election of grace." When God's holy dove is driven from cities and the abodes of men, that bird of sweetest note can be heard singing in remote places, even in dens and in the clefts of the rocks. II. We may learn a lesson on THE LAW OF SOCIAL LIFE. There is throughout the book a constant reference to the Levitical law. There is the goel, the redeeming kinsman. But I wish you specially to observe the beneficence of the law. I wish that some who speak of the barbarous character of the old law would take their Bibles and read the eighteenth chapter of Leviticus. You will there see that God ordained that a portion should be reserved for the poor and the stranger. The law gave a measure of wealth to the indigent. It solved in this way one of the most terrible problems of our modern society. While it did this there was an ample margin left for the exercise of private charity. The corner of the field was defined to mean a portion that in modern language would have been a poor-rate of fourpence in the pound. It was not a system of outdoor relief, for the Book of Ruth shows us that there was great delicacy to be observed in giving. Depend upon it, as the spirit of the Old Testament works, the bitter taunt will become less and less true that England is a paradise for the rich and a purgatory for the poor. III. There is AN EVANGELICAL LAW CONNECTING THIS BOOK OF THE OLD TESTAMENT WITH CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD. IV. Lastly, we learn THE LAW WHICH PERVADES THE LIFE OF EVERY TRUE BELIEVER. We may learn that our lives are not random things, and that there is no such thing as chance about the Christian's life. This story of Ruth, like every story of the highest sort, would lead us to perfect trust in Him who wants His own dear children to lift up their hands to Him when in darkness. They must wrestle in the darkness before they can face the sunrise. God seems to keep silence when we pray. We ask, and God seems not to give us the things for which we pray. Ah! but He gives us far better. (*Abp. William Alexander.*)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